CORNCRAKE

DEC 2025
ISSUE 22

NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Nathan Hood hosts The Merry Corncrakes Podcast

Treat yourself to interviews with feature authors and audiobooks of stories appearing in the Corncrake, together with sophisticated discussions on writing and story creation. Watch it now!

Youtube: @ncjhood

CONTENTS
ISSUE 22

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.
- John Donne

Editor's Note

Merry Crakemas! This is the second ever Corncrake, and we are very grateful for the support we have had from all of you good readers this year.

In this issue is a selection of stories that should help us all get into the spirit of Christmas, but also to consider the real meaning of Christmas, behind all the food and decorations.

The art too, helps to lift the spirits to higher matters, but also celebrating the glorious winter landscape.

We hope your Christmas will be filled with snow, good family times, and much merriment.

There are good things ahead for the Corncrake next year. Stay tuned.

Call of the Shieldmaiden
Editor-in-Chief

Dates of Importance

Saint Nicholas was a 4th-century Christian bishop from Myra who became renowned for his generosity and kindness, particularly towards children and the poor. He is traditionally associated with miracles, including secretly providing dowries for impoverished girls, which led to his veneration as the patron saint of children, sailors, merchants, and pawnbrokers. His feast day is celebrated on **December 6th**, a date that has been observed since at least the 8th century. Saint Nicholas was exceptionally popular in England before the English Reformation. At one time, more than 500 churches in England were dedicated to him. The name "Nicholas" was also one of the most common male names in medieval England, reflecting his widespread veneration. His influence extended to customs such as the medieval Boy Bishop tradition, which was particularly embraced in England. Churches dedicated to him often celebrate his feast day with special events, including processions, music, and charitable collections for the less fortunate. The figure of St. Nicholas evolved into the English folkloric character of Father Christmas, who became a symbol of the festive season, embodying the spirit of good cheer, feasting, and merriment. The English tradition of Father Christmas remains a distinct cultural legacy of St. Nicholas's enduring influence.

The **second Sunday of Advent is December 7, 2025**, and it is traditionally associated with the theme of peace. On this day, the second purple candle, often called the "Bethlehem Candle," is lit on the Advent wreath, symbolizing the peace that Christ brings to the world. The liturgical readings for this Sunday include passages from Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew, emphasizing God's consolation and the call to conversion.

Saint Lucy, also known as Lucia of Syracuse, (**13 December**) was a Roman virgin martyr who died in 304 AD during the Diocletianic Persecution. Born around 283 AD in Syracuse, Sicily, to a wealthy Roman family. Saint Lucy is particularly associated with light, derived from her name's root "lux," meaning light in Latin. This connection is symbolized in art, where she is often depicted holding a dish with two eyes, representing the legend that her eyes were gouged out before her execution but miraculously restored after her death. This story has led to her being the patron saint of the blind and those with eye problems. Her popularity extended to England, during the Middle Ages where her feast day was celebrated as a holy day of the second rank, during which non-essential work, except for farming, was prohibited. Two churches in England were dedicated to her before the 8th century, even during a time when much of the country was still pagan. However, her veneration declined in England following the Protestant Reformation.

The **third Sunday of Advent**, known as Gaudete Sunday, is a joyful midpoint in the Advent season, which is otherwise a time of penitence and preparation for Christmas. The name "Gaudete" comes from the Latin word meaning "rejoice," taken from the first word of the entrance antiphon for the day's Mass: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. The Lord is near". This Sunday is marked by a break in the penitential tone, symbolizing the nearness of Christ's coming. In many Christian traditions, rose-colored vestments are worn, and the third candle on the Advent wreath is lit to represent joy. The liturgical readings focus on rejoicing in the Lord, the mission of John the Baptist, and the promise of Christ's return.

The **Fourth Sunday of Advent** is the final Sunday of the Advent season, a period of spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. It typically falls on the Sunday closest to December 25. This day marks the culmination of the four-week Advent journey, focusing on the themes of love and peace as Christians reflect on the imminent birth of Jesus Christ. The candle lit on this Sunday is traditionally known as the "Angel's Candle" or the "Candle of Love," symbolizing God's love for humanity and the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ. The theme of love is emphasized, drawing from the biblical account of God's love demonstrated through the Incarnation, as expressed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son". The Gospel reading for this day often centers on the Annunciation to Mary, where the angel Gabriel announces the birth of Jesus, and includes the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise. The liturgical color for this Sunday is typically violet or purple, and the season culminates in the celebration of Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The Fourth Sunday of Advent is also associated with the O Antiphon "O Rex Gentium" (O King of the Nations), reflecting on Christ as the promised King who fulfills God's covenant with David.

Yule is a winter festival coinciding with the winter solstice on **December 21–22** in the Northern Hemisphere and is considered one of the oldest winter celebrations in the world. It predates Christianity and was celebrated by ancient cultures such as the Celts, who saw the solstice as a time of the sun's return after the longest night. The term "Yule" derives from the Old English word geol, associated with the cyclical nature of the year and the return of light. In England, Yule celebrations have deep roots in pre-Christian traditions. The Druids, marked the winter solstice with rituals including the cutting of mistletoe from oak trees, which was believed to have magical powers and symbolize life during winter. A central tradition was the burning of the Yule log, a large log brought into homes and burned for up to twelve days to symbolically coax the sun back into motion, banish darkness, and ward off evil spirits.

The 12-day period of Yuletide, beginning on the eve of the winter solstice, includes various traditions such as lighting candles, decorating homes with evergreen plants like holly and mistletoe, feasting, storytelling, and singing carols. The tradition of kissing under mistletoe, believed to bring luck and fertility, is still observed. In some regions, the folk tale of the Deer Mother is shared, symbolizing the return of the sun through the courage of a reindeer matriarch. Additionally, the concept of hygge, emphasizing coziness and comfort, is embraced during the long winter months. Yule is also celebrated by Neo-Pagans, who observe the festival with rituals honoring the return of the Sun, reenactments of the Holly King and Oak King battle, and staying awake until dawn to mark the turning of the year. In recent years, events such as feasting, storytelling, and creative workshops have been hosted by cultural groups like Ad Gefrin, reflecting a revival of traditional Yule customs.

Christmas Day is the most widely observed holiday in the United Kingdom, celebrated annually on **December 25**. It commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, a central event in Christian religious traditions, though it has evolved into a secular holiday celebrated by people of various faiths and cultures. The festive period typically begins in late November or December, with preparations including decorating homes and churches with Christmas trees, lights, and ornaments. On Christmas Day, families gather together to share a traditional meal, usually served around midday. The main course typically features roast turkey or goose, accompanied by roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts, stuffing, and other seasonal vegetables. Dessert is often Christmas pudding, a rich, spiced fruit pudding. A popular pre-meal tradition is pulling Christmas crackers, which produce a loud "crack" when pulled apart and contain paper crowns, jokes, and small gifts. Gift-giving is a central activity on Christmas Day, symbolizing the gifts brought to Jesus by the Wise Men. Presents are usually opened in the morning, often after children wake up to find their stockings—hung by the fireplace, bed, or tree—filled by Father Christmas. Families may also open larger gifts found under the Christmas tree later in the day. The Queen's Christmas Message, broadcast on television and radio, is a traditional feature watched by millions across the country.

The **second day of Christmas** is **26th December**, which is known as Boxing Day. It is a public bank holiday in the UK and commemorates the Christian martyr St Stephen. The day also marks the beginning of the Twelve Days of Christmas, a festive season that celebrates the Nativity of Jesus, beginning on Christmas Day.

The **first day of Christmas** is Christmas Day, observed on **December 25**. This day marks the beginning of the Twelve Days of Christmas, a festive Christian season celebrating the Nativity of Jesus Christ. In most Western Christian traditions, Christmas Day is considered the First Day of Christmas, and the period lasts until January 5, known as Twelfth Night or Epiphany Eve. The celebration includes religious observances such as church services and feasting, as well as cultural traditions like gift-giving and family gatherings.

Boxing Day is a public holiday celebrated on **December 26**, the day after Christmas Day,. It originated from traditions in medieval and Victorian England, where it was customary for employers to give "Christmas boxes" — gifts, money, or food — to servants, tradespeople, and the poor as a token of appreciation for their service throughout the year. The name may also derive from the practice of opening alms boxes in churches on this day to distribute collected donations to the needy, a tradition linked to the Feast of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, whose feast day falls on December 26.

Saint Stephen (December 26) converted to Christianity and became one of the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to care for the community's widows, particularly the Hellenist converts in Jerusalem. He is recognized as the first Christian martyr, stoned to death around 36 CE after delivering a powerful speech before the Sanhedrin that accused the Jewish authorities of resisting the Holy Spirit and rejecting the Messiah, a claim that enraged his audience. His final words, a prayer for forgiveness for his attackers, echoed Jesus' own words on the cross. Saint Stephen holds significant relevance to England, where he has been venerated since early Christian times. Many churches in England were dedicated to him, especially following the Norman Conquest, and he became a prominent figure in the country's religious landscape. The Guild of St Stephen, an international organization for altar servers founded in England in 1904, is named in his honor and continues to promote his legacy through liturgical service and devotion.

The **third day of Christma**s, observed on **December 27th**, is the Feast of Saint John the Apostle, commemorating the disciple whom Jesus loved and the author of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and the Book of Revelation. This day is associated with traditions of celebration and sharing, including the drinking of mulled wine, historically known as "the love of St. John," which was blessed and believed to have protective qualities, such as neutralizing poison. It was customary for the head of the household to toast the mother with the words, "I drink you the love of St. John," to which she would reply, "I thank you for the love of St. John". The day also serves as a time to reflect on Christ's love for humanity and the apostle John's deep connection to that love.

The **fourth day of Christmas is December 28th.** It is known as the Feast of the Holy Innocents, also referred to as Childermas or Innocent's Day. This day commemorates the children who were killed by King Herod in his attempt to eliminate the infant Jesus after the arrival of the Magi. The event is described in the Gospel of Matthew, where Herod ordered the execution of all male infants in Bethlehem aged two years and under. This day serves as a somber reminder of the violence and fear that accompanied the birth of Jesus, contrasting with the joy of the Christmas season. In some traditions, such as during the Tudor period, children were given special privileges on this day as a symbolic gesture, despite the day's somber theme. The day is also associated with the gift of "four calling birds" in the traditional carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas," which some interpret as symbolizing the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The **fifth day of Christmas** is **29th December**. It is historically known as the Feast of Saint Thomas Becket, commemorating the martyrdom of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was killed on this day in 1170 for challenging the authority of King Henry II over the Church. This day is also seen as a time to reflect on the struggle for freedom and the defense of religious and human rights. In the context of the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the fifth day features the gift of five gold rings.

Thomas Becket (29 December) was an English cleric and statesman who served as Lord Chancellor from 1155 to 1162 and then as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until his death in 1170. Born around 1118 or 1119 in Cheapside, London, to a wealthy merchant family, Becket received a strong education and began his career in government service under Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury. He rose to prominence as Chancellor, a position he transformed into a central role in the royal administration, and became a close friend and companion to King Henry II. Becket's relevance to England stems primarily from his dramatic conflict with King Henry II over the rights and privileges of the Church, particularly the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts versus royal authority. Henry II sought to limit the power of the Church, especially its ability to try clergy in church courts, which he viewed as undermining royal justice. When Henry appointed Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, he expected him to continue serving the crown, but Becket underwent a profound transformation, embracing a devout religious life and becoming a staunch defender of the Church's independence. This shift led to a bitter struggle between the two men, culminating in Becket's exile from 1164 to 1170 after he rejected the Constitutions of Clarendon, which favored royal authority. Becket's murder on 29 December 1170 inside Canterbury Cathedral by four knights believed to be acting on Henry II's wishes shocked medieval society and turned him into a martyr. The outrage that followed forced Henry II to perform public penance, and Becket was canonized as a saint by Pope Alexander III just two years after his death in 1173. His tomb became the most popular pilgrimage site in England, and his cult played a significant role in English religious and cultural life for centuries. Becket's legacy endures as a symbol of the conflict between secular and ecclesiastical power, and he remains a patron saint of secular clergy in both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

The **sixth day of Christmas** is **December 30th**. It is traditionally observed as the Feast of Saint Egwin of Worcester, a sixth-century bishop who was the founder of Evesham Abbey in England and known as a protector of widows and orphans. He is also recognized for his commitment to moral integrity and the sanctity of marriage. This day is also associated with the Feast of the Holy Family, which sometimes falls on this date, emphasizing the importance of family life and Christian principles. In the context of the Christmas carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the sixth day features the gift of "six geese a-laying," which symbolizes the six days of creation.

The **7th day of Christmas** is the seventh day following Christmas Day, which falls on **December 31st**. This day is also known as the Feast of Saint Sylvester I, a fourth-century Pope who served from 314 to 335 AD. In many eastern European countries, this day is referred to as "Sylvester". It is celebrated as the last day of the secular calendar and is associated with New Year's Eve, a time of hospitality, social gathering, and welcoming the new year. The liturgical celebration continues the Christmas Octave, emphasizing the Nativity of Christ.
In the context of the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the gift given on the 7th day is "seven swans a-swimming". This song is cumulative, meaning each verse adds a new gift while repeating all previous ones. The swans are often interpreted symbolically, representing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit or the seven sacraments.

Hogmanay is the Scots word for the last day of the old year, synonymous with the celebration of the New Year in the Scottish manner, observed on **31 December**. It is considered one of Scotland's most important holidays, with festivities often extending into New Year's Day (1 January) and sometimes even 2 January, a Scottish bank holiday. The celebration has deep historical roots, potentially originating from Norse winter solstice traditions and ancient Gaelic festivals like Samhain, with the period known as Yuletide in Scotland derived from the Old Norse word for the midwinter festival of Yule. The significance of Hogmanay grew particularly after the Protestant Reformation, when Christmas was discouraged and gift-giving and celebration shifted to New Year, making Hogmanay the more traditional winter festival in Scotland. Celebrations across Scotland are vibrant and diverse, featuring a mix of national and local customs. A central tradition is "first-footing," where the first guest to enter a home after midnight is believed to set the luck for the coming year; traditionally, this person is a tall, dark-haired man who brings symbolic gifts such as coal, shortbread, whisky, or black bun. Another widespread custom is singing "Auld Lang Syne" at midnight, a tradition popularized by Robert Burns and now observed globally. The celebration also includes late-night partying, family gatherings, feasting, gift exchanges, and fireworks. In Edinburgh, the Hogmanay Festival, which began in 1993, is one of the largest outdoor New Year's Eve celebrations in the world, featuring a torchlight procession, a massive street party, a live headline concert, and spectacular fireworks. Other notable local traditions include the fireball swinging in Stonehaven, where residents swing large burning balls through the streets, and the ceremonial burning of the clavie in Burghead, a bonfire made from split casks. In recent years, a growing tradition involves brave individuals taking a dip in the sea on New Year's Day for a fresh start. These festivities, combined with the spirit of hospitality and community, make Hogmanay a uniquely Scottish and unforgettable celebration.

Christmas at Thompson Hall

Anthony Trollope

CHAPTER I. MRS. BROWN'S SUCCESS.

Every one remembers the severity of the Christmas of 187-. I will not designate the year more closely, lest I should enable those who are too curious to investigate the circumstances of this story, and inquire into details which I do not intend to make known. That winter, however, was especially severe, and the cold of the last ten days of December was more felt, I think, in Paris than in any part of England. It may, indeed, be doubted whether there is any town in any country in which thoroughly bad weather is more afflicting than in the French capital. Snow and hail seem to be colder there, and fires certainly are less warm, than in London. And then there is a feeling among visitors to Paris that Paris ought to be gay; that gayety, prettiness, and liveliness are its aims, as money, commerce, and general business are the aims of London, which, with its outside sombre darkness, does often seem to want an excuse for its ugliness. But on this occasion, at this Christmas of 187-, Paris was neither gay, nor pretty, nor lively. You could not walk the streets without being ankle-deep, not in snow, but in snow that had just become slush; and there was falling throughout the day and night of the 23d of December a succession of damp, half-frozen abominations from the sky which made it almost impossible for men and women to go about their business.

It was at ten o'clock on that evening that an English lady and gentleman arrived at the Grand Hôtel on the Boulevard des Italiens. As I have reasons for concealing the names of this married couple, I will call them Mr. and Mrs. Brown. Now, I wish it to be understood that in all the general affairs of life this gentleman and this lady lived happily together, with all the amenities which should bind a husband and a wife. Mrs. Brown was one of a wealthy family, and Mr. Brown, when he married her, had been relieved from the necessity of earning his bread. Nevertheless, she had at once yielded to him when he expressed a desire to spend the winters of their life in the South of France; and he, though he was by disposition somewhat idle, and but little prone to the energetic occupations of life, would generally allow himself, at other periods of the year, to be carried hither and thither by her, whose more robust nature delighted in the excitement of travelling. But on this occasion there had been a little difference between them.

Early in December an intimation had reached Mrs. Brown at Pau that on the coming Christmas there was to be a great gathering of all the Thompsons in the Thompson family hall at Stratford-le-Bow, and that she, who had been a Thompson, was desired to join the party with her husband. On this occasion her only sister was desirous of introducing to the family generally a most excellent young man to whom she had recently become engaged. The Thompsons—the real name, however, is in fact concealed—were a numerous and a thriving people. There were uncles and cousins and brothers who had all done well in the world, and who were all likely to do better still. One had lately been returned to Parliament for the Essex Flats, and was at the time of which I am writing a conspicuous member of the gallant Conservative majority. It was partly in triumph at this success that the great Christmas gathering of the Thompsons was to be held, and an opinion had been expressed by the legislator himself that, should Mrs. Brown, with her husband, fail to join the family on this happy occasion, she and he would be regarded as being but fainéant Thompsons.

Since her marriage, which was an affair now nearly eight years old, Mrs. Brown had never passed a Christmas in England. The desirability of doing so had often been mooted by her. Her very soul craved the festivities of holly and mince-pies. There had ever been meetings of the Thompsons at Thompson Hall, though meetings not so significant, not so important to the family, as this one which was now to be collected. More than once had she expressed a wish to see old Christmas again in the old house among the old faces. But her husband had always pleaded a certain weakness about his throat and chest as a reason for remaining among the delights of Pau. Year after year she had yielded, and now this loud summons had come.

It was not without considerable trouble that she had induced Mr. Brown to come as far as Paris. Most unwillingly had he left Pau; and then, twice on his journey—both at Bordeaux and Tours—he had made an attempt to return. From the first moment he had pleaded his throat, and when at last he had consented to make the journey, he had stipulated for sleeping at those two towns and at Paris. Mrs. Brown, who, with no slightest feeling of fatigue, could have made the journey from Pau to Stratford without stopping, had assented to everything, so that they might be at Thompson Hall on Christmas-eve. When Mr. Brown uttered his unavailing complaints at the first two towns at which they stayed, she did not, perhaps, quite believe all that he said of his own condition. We know how prone the strong are to suspect the weakness of the weak—as the weak are to be disgusted by the strength of the strong. There were, perhaps, a few words between them on the journey, but the result had hitherto been in favor of the lady. She had succeeded in bringing Mr. Brown as far as Paris.

Had the occasion been less important, no doubt she would have yielded. The weather had been bad even when they left Pau, but as they had made their way northward it had become worse and still worse. As they left Tours, Mr. Brown, in a hoarse whisper, had declared his conviction that the journey would kill him. Mrs. Brown, however, had unfortunately noticed half an hour before that he had scolded the waiter on the score of an over-charged franc or two with a loud and clear voice. Had she really believed that there was danger, or even suffering, she would have yielded; but no woman is satisfied in such a matter to be taken in by false pretences. She observed that he ate a good dinner on his way to Paris, and that he took a small glass of cognac with complete relish, which a man really suffering from bronchitis surely would not do. So she persevered, and brought him into Paris, late in the evening, in the midst of all that slush and snow. Then, as they sat down to supper, she thought he did speak hoarsely, and her loving feminine heart began to misgive her.

But this now was, at any rate, clear to her,—that he could not be worse off by going on to London than he would be should he remain in Paris. If a man is to be ill, he had better be ill{7} in the bosom of his family than at a hotel. What comfort could he have, what relief, in that huge barrack? As for the cruelty of the weather, London could not be worse than Paris, and then she thought she had heard that sea air is good for a sore throat. In that bedroom which had been allotted to them au quatrieme they could not even get a decent fire. It would in every way be wrong now to forego the great Christmas gathering when nothing could be gained by staying in Paris.

She had perceived that, as her husband became really ill, he became also more tractable and less disputatious. Immediately after that little glass of cognac he had declared that he would be —— if he would go beyond Paris, and she began to fear that, after all, everything would have been done in vain. But as they went down to supper between ten and eleven he was more subdued, and merely remarked that this journey would, he was sure, be the death of him. It was half past eleven when they got back to their bedroom, and then he seemed to speak with good sense, and also with much real apprehension. "If I can't get something to relieve me, I know I shall never make my way on," he said. It was intended{8} that they should leave the hotel at half past five the next morning, so as to arrive at Stratford, travelling by the tidal train, at half past seven on Christmas-eve. The early hour, the long journey, the infamous weather, the prospect of that horrid gulf between Boulogne and Folkestone, would have been as nothing to Mrs. Brown, had it not been for that settled look of anguish which had now pervaded her husband's face. "If you don't find something to relieve me, I shall never live through it," he said again, sinking back into the questionable comfort of a Parisian hotel arm-chair.

"But, my dear, what can I do?" she asked, almost in tears, standing over him and caressing him. He was a thin, genteel-looking man, with a fine long soft brown beard, a little bald at the top of the

head, but certainly a genteel-looking man. She loved him dearly, and in her softer moods was apt to spoil him with her caresses. "What can I do, my dearie? You know I would do anything if I could. Get into bed, my pet, and be warm, and then to-morrow morning you will be all right." At this moment he was preparing himself for his bed, and she was assisting him. Then she tied a piece of flannel round his throat, and kissed him, and put him in beneath the bedclothes.

"I'll tell you what you can do," he said, very hoarsely. His voice was so bad now that she could hardly hear him. So she crept close to him, and bent over him. She would do anything if he would only say what. Then he told her what was his plan. Down in the salon he had seen a large jar of mustard standing on a sideboard. As he left the room he had observed that this had not been withdrawn with the other appurtenances of the meal. If she could manage to find her way down there, taking with her a handkerchief folded for the purpose, and if she could then appropriate a part of the contents of that jar, and, returning with her prize, apply it to his throat, he thought that he could get some relief, so that he might be able to leave his bed the next morning at five. "But I am afraid it will be very disagreeable for you to go down all alone at this time of night," he croaked out in a piteous whisper.

"Of course I'll go," said she. "I don't mind going in the least. Nobody will bite me"; and she at once began to fold a clean handkerchief. "I won't be two minutes, my darling; and if there is a grain of mustard in the house, I'll have it on your chest almost immediately." She was a woman not easily cowed, and the journey down into the salon was nothing to her. Before she went she tucked the clothes carefully up to his ears, and then she started.

To run along the first corridor till she came to a flight of stairs was easy enough, and easy enough to descend them. Then there was another corridor and another flight, and a third corridor and a third flight, and she began to think that she was wrong. She found herself in a part of the hotel which she had not hitherto visited, and soon discovered by looking through an open door or two that she had found her way among a set of private sitting-rooms which she had not seen before. Then she tried to make her way back, up the same stairs and through the same passages, so that she might start again. She was beginning to think that she had lost herself altogether, and that she would be able to find neither the salon nor her bedroom, when she happily met the night porter. She was dressed in a loose white{11} dressing-gown, with a white net over her loose hair, and with white worsted slippers. I ought, perhaps, to have described her personal appearance sooner. She was a large woman with a commanding bust, thought by some to be handsome, after the manner of Juno. But with strangers there was a certain severity of manner about her—a fortification, as it were, of her virtue against all possible attacks—a declared determination to maintain, at all points, the beautiful character of a British matron, which, much as it had been appreciated at Thompson Hall, had met with some ill-natured criticism among French men and women. At Pau she had been called La Fière Anglaise. The name had reached her own ears and those of her husband. He had been much annoyed, but she had taken it in good part—had, indeed, been somewhat proud of the title—and had endeavored to live up to it. With her husband she could, on occasion, be soft, but she was of opinion that with other men a British matron should be stern. She was now greatly in want of assistance; but, nevertheless, when she met the porter she remembered her character. "I have lost my way wandering through these horrid passages," she said in her severest tone. This was in answer to some question from him—some question to which her reply was given very slowly. Then, when he asked where madame wished to go, she paused, again thinking what destination she would announce. No doubt the man could take her back to her bedroom, but if so, the mustard must be renounced, and with the mustard, as she now feared, all hope of reaching Thompson Hall on Christmas-eve. But she, though she was in many respects a brave woman, did not dare to tell the man that she was prowling about the hotel in order that she might make a midnight raid upon the mustard pot. She paused, therefore, for a moment, that she might collect her thoughts, erecting her head as she did so in her best Juno fashion, till the porter was lost in admiration. Thus she gained time to fabricate a tale. She had, she said, dropped her handkerchief under the supper-table; would he show her the way to the salon, in order that she might pick it up? But the porter did more than that, and accompanied her to the room in which she had supped.

Here, of course, there was a prolonged and, it need hardly be said, a vain search. The good-natured man insisted on emptying an enormous receptacle of soiled table napkins, and on turning them over one by one, in order that the lady's property might be found. The lady stood by unhappy, but still patient, and as the man was stooping to his work, her eye was on the mustard pot. There it was, capable of containing enough to blister the throats of a score of sufferers. She edged off a little toward it while the man was busy, trying to persuade herself that he would surely forgive her if she took the mustard and told him her whole story. But the descent from her Juno bearing would have been so great! She must have owned, not only to the quest for mustard, but also to a fib—and she could not do it. The porter was at last of opinion that madame must have made a mistake, and madame acknowledged that she was afraid it was so.

With a longing, lingering eye, with an eye turned back, oh! so sadly to the great jar, she left the room, the porter leading the way. She assured him that she would find it by herself, but he would not leave her till he had put her on to the proper passage. The journey seemed to be longer now even than before; but as she ascended the many stairs she swore to herself that she would not even yet be balked of her object. Should her husband want comfort for his poor throat, and the comfort be there within her reach, and he not have it? She counted every stair as she went up, and marked every turn well. She was sure now that she would know the way, and that she could return to the room without fault. She would go back to the salon. Even though the man should encounter her again, she would go boldly forward and seize the remedy which her poor husband so grievously required. "Ah, yes," she said, when the porter told her that her room, No. 333, was in the corridor which they had then reached, "I know it all now. I am so much obliged. Do not come a step farther." He was anxious to accompany her up to the very door, but she stood in the passage, and prevailed. He lingered awhile—naturally. Unluckily, she had brought no money with her, and could not give him the two-franc piece which he had earned. Nor could she fetch it from her room, feeling that, were she to return to her husband without the mustard, no second attempt would be possible. The disappointed man turned on his heel at last, and made his way down the stairs and along the passage. It seemed to her to be almost an eternity while she listened to his still audible footsteps. She had gone on, creeping noiselessly up to the very door of her room, and there she stood, shading the candle in her hand, till she thought that the man must have wandered away into some farthest corner of that endless building. Then she turned once more and retraced her steps.

There was no difficulty now as to the way. She knew it, every stair. At the head of each flight she stood and listened, but not a sound was to be heard, and then she went on again. Her heart beat high with anxious desire to achieve her object, and at the same time with fear. What might

have been explained so easily at first would now be as difficult of explanation, At last she was in the great public vestibule, which she was now visiting for the third time, and of which, at her last visit, she had taken the bearings accurately. The door was there—closed, indeed, but it opened f to the hand, the hall and on e stairs and o n g the passages there had been gas, but here there was no light beyond that given by the little taper which she carried. When accompanied by the porter she had not feared the darkness, but now there was something in the obscurity which made her dread to walk the length of the room up to the

mustard jar. She paused, and listened, and trembled. Then she thought of the glories of Thompson Hall, of the genial warmth of a British Christmas, of that proud legislator who was her first cousin, and with a rush she made good the distance, and laid her hand upon the copious delf. She looked round, but there was no one there; no sound was heard; not the distant creak of a shoe, not a rattle from one of those thousand doors. As she paused with her fair hand upon the top of the jar, while the other held the white cloth on which the medicinal compound was to be placed, she looked like Lady Macbeth as she listened at Duncan's chamber door.

There was no doubt as to the sufficiency of the contents. The jar was full nearly up to the lips. The mixture was, no doubt, very different from that good, wholesome English mustard which your cook makes fresh for you, with a little water, in two minutes. It was impregnated with a sour odor, and was, to English eyes, unwholesome of color. But still it was mustard. She seized the horn spoon, and without further delay spread an ample sufficiency on the folded square of the handkerchief. Then she commenced to hurry her return.

But still there was a difficulty, no thought of which had occurred to her before. The candle occupied one hand, so that she had but the other for the sustenance of her treasure. Had she brought a plate or saucer from the salon, it would have been all well. As it was, she was obliged to keep her eye intent on her right hand, and to proceed very slowly on her return journey. She was surprised to find what an aptitude the thing had to slip from her grasp. But still she progressed slowly, and was careful not to miss a turning. At last she was safe at her chamber door. There it was, No. 333.

CHAPTER II. MRS. BROWN'S FAILURE.

With her eye still fixed upon her burden, she glanced up at the number of the door—333. She had been determined all through not to forget that. Then she turned the latch and crept in. The chamber also was dark after the gaslight on the stairs, but that was so much the better. She herself had put out the two candles on the dressing-table before she had left her husband. As she was closing the door behind her she paused, and could hear that he was sleeping. She was well aware that she had been long absent—quite long enough for a man to fall into slumber who was given that way. She must have been gone, she thought, fully an hour. There had been no end to that turning over of napkins which she had so well known to be altogether vain. She paused at the centre-table of the room, still looking at the mustard, which she now delicately dried from off her hand. She had had no idea that it would have been so difficult to carry so light and so small an affair. But there it was, and nothing had been lost. She took some small instrument from the washing-stand, and with the handle collected the flowing fragments into the centre. Then the question occurred to her whether, as her husband was sleeping so sweetly, it would be well to disturb him. She listened again, and felt that the slight murmur of a snore with which her ears were regaled was altogether free from any real malady in the throat. Then it occurred to her that, after all, fatigue perhaps had only made him cross. She bethought herself how, during the whole journey, she had failed to believe in his illness. What meals he had eaten! How thoroughly he had been able to enjoy his full complement of cigars! And then that glass of brandy, against which she had raised her voice slightly in feminine opposition. And now he was sleeping there like an infant, with full, round, perfected, almost sonorous workings of the throat. Who does not know that sound, almost of two rusty bits of iron scratching against each other, which comes from a suffering windpipe? There was no semblance of that here. Why disturb him when he was so thoroughly enjoying that rest which, more certainly than anything else, would fit him for the fatigue of the morrow's journey?

I think that, after all her labor, she would have left the pungent cataplasm on the table and have crept gently into bed beside him, had not a thought suddenly struck her of the great injury he had been doing her if he were not really ill. To send her down there, in a strange hotel, wandering among the passages, in the middle of the night, subject to the contumely of any one who might meet her, on a commission which, if it were not sanctified by absolute necessity, would be so thoroughly objectionable! At this moment she hardly did believe that he had ever really been ill. Let him have the cataplasm; if not as a remedy, then as a punishment. It could, at any rate, do him no harm. It was with an idea of avenging rather than of justifying the past labors of the night that she proceeded at once to quick action.

Leaving the candle on the table, so that she might steady her right hand with the left, she hurried stealthily to the bedside. Even though he was behaving badly to her, she would not cause him discomfort by waking him roughly. She would do a wife's duty to him as a British matron should. She would not only put the warm mixture on his neck, but would sit carefully{22} by him for twenty minutes, so that she might relieve him from it when the proper period should have come for removing the counter-irritation from his throat. There would doubtless be some little difficulty in this—in collecting the mustard after it had served her purpose. Had she been at home, surrounded by her own comforts, the application would have been made with some delicate linen bag, through which the pungency of the spice would have penetrated with strength sufficient for the purpose. But the circumstance of the occasion had not admitted this. She had, she felt, done wonders in achieving so much success as this which she had obtained. If there should be anything disagreeable in the operation, he must submit to it. He had asked for mustard for his throat, and mustard he should have.

As these thoughts passed quickly through her mind, leaning over him in the dark, with her eye fixed on the mixture lest it should slip, she gently raised his flowing beard with her left hand, and with her other inverted rapidly, steadily but very softly fixed the handkerchief on his throat. From the bottom of his chin to the spot at which the collar-bones meeting together form the orifice of the chest, it covered{23} the whole noble expanse. There was barely time for a glance, but never had she been more conscious of the grand proportions of that manly throat. A sweet feeling of pity came upon her, causing her to determine to relieve his sufferings in the shorter space of fifteen minutes. He had been lying on his back, with his lips apart, and as she held back his beard, that and her hand nearly covered the features of his face. But he made no violent effort to free himself from the encounter. He did not even move an arm or a leg. He simply emitted a snore louder than any that had come before. She was aware that it was not his wont to be so loud—that there was generally something more delicate and perhaps more querulous in his nocturnal voice, but then the present circumstances were exceptional. She dropped the beard very softly—and there on the pillow before her lay the face of a stranger. She had put the mustard plaster on the wrong man.

Not Priam wakened in the dead of night, not Dido when first she learned that Æneas had fled, not Othello when he learned that Desdmona had been chaste, not Medea when she became conscious of her slaughtered children, could have been more struck with horror than was this British matron as she stood for a moment gazing with awe on that stranger's bed. One vain, half-completed, snatching grasp she made at the handkerchief, and then drew back her hand. If she were to touch him, would he not wake at once, and find her standing there in his bedroom? And then how could she explain it? By what words could she so quickly make him know the circumstances of that strange occurrence that he should accept it all before he had said a word that might offend her? For a moment she stood all but paralyzed after that faint ineffectual movement of her arm. Then he stirred his head uneasily on the pillow, opened wider his lips, and twice in rapid succession snored louder than before. She started back a couple of paces, and with her body placed between him and the candle, with her face averted, but with her hand still resting on the foot of the bed, she endeavored to think what duty required of her.

She had injured the man. Though she had done it most unwittingly, there could be no doubt but that she had injured him. If for a moment she could be brave, the injury might in truth be little; but how disastrous might be the consequences if she were now in her cowardice to leave him, who could tell? Applied for fifteen or twenty minutes, a mustard plaster may be the salvation of a throat ill at ease; but if left there throughout the night, upon the neck of a strong man, ailing nothing, only too prone in his strength to slumber soundly, how sad, how painful, for aught she knew how dangerous, might be the effects! And surely it was an error which any man with a heart in his bosom might pardon! Judging from what little she had seen of him, she thought that he must have a heart in his bosom. Was it not her duty to wake him, and then quietly to extricate him from the embarrassment which she had brought upon him?

But in doing this what words should she use? How should she wake him? How should she make him understand her goodness, her beneficence, her sense of duty, before he should have jumped from the bed and rushed to the bell, and have summoned all above, and all below, to the rescue? "Sir, sir, do not move, do not stir, do not scream. I have put a mustard plaster on your throat, thinking that you were my husband. As yet no harm has been done. Let me take it off, and then hold your peace forever." Where is the man of such native constancy and grace of spirit that, at the first moment of waking with a shock, he could hear these words from the mouth of an unknown woman by his bedside, and at once obey them to the letter? Would he not surely jump from his bed, with that horrid compound falling about him—from which there could be no complete relief unless he would keep his present attitude without a motion. The picture which presented itself to her mind as to his probable conduct was so terrible that she found herself unable to incur the risk.

Then an idea presented itself to her mind. We all know how in a moment quick thoughts will course through the subtle brain. She would find that porter and send him to explain it all. There should be no concealment now. She would tell the story and would bid him to find the necessary aid. Alas! as she told herself that she would do so, she knew well that she was only running from the danger which it was her duty to encounter. Once again she put out her hand as though to return along the bed. Then thrice he snorted louder than before, and moved up his knee uneasily beneath the clothes as though the sharpness of the mustard were already working upon his skin. She watched him for a moment longer, and then, with the candle in her hand, she fled.

Poor human nature! Had he been an old man, even a middle-aged man, she would not have left him to his unmerited sufferings. As it was, though she completely recognized her duty, and knew what justice and goodness demanded of her, she could not do it. But there was still left to her that plan of sending the night porter to him. It was not till she was out of the room and had gently closed the door behind her that she began to bethink herself how she had made the mistake. With a glance of her eye she looked up, and then saw the number on the door—353. Remarking to herself, with a Briton's natural criticism on things French, that those horrid foreigners do not know how to make their figures, she scudded rather than ran along the corridor, and then down some stairs and along another passage—so that she might not be found in the neighborhood should the poor man in his agony rush rapidly from his bed.

In the confusion of her first escape she hardly ventured to look for her own passage—nor did she in the least know how she had lost her way when she came up-stairs with the mustard in her hand. But at the present moment her chief object was the night porter. She went on descending till she came again to that vestibule, and looking up at the clock saw that it was now past one. It was not yet midnight when she left her husband, but she was not at all astonished at the lapse of time. It seemed to her as though she had passed a night among these miseries. And, oh, what a night! But there was yet much to be done. She must find that porter, and then return to her own suffering husband. Ah! what now should she say to him? If he should really be ill, how should she assauge him? And yet how more than ever necessary was it that they should leave that hotel early in the morning—that they should leave Paris by the very earliest and quickest train that would take them as fugitives from their present dangers! The door of the salon was open, but she had no courage to go in search of a second supply. She would have lacked strength to carry it up the stairs. Where, now, oh! where was that man? From the vestibule she made her way into the hall, but everything seemed to be deserted. Through the glass she could see a light in the court beyond, but she could not bring herself to endeavor even to open the hall doors.

And now she was very cold—chilled to her very bones. All this had been done at Christmas, and during such severity of weather as had never before been experienced by living Parisians. A feeling of great pity for herself gradually came upon her. What wrong had she done, that she should be so grievously punished? Why should she be driven to wander about in this way till her limbs were failing her? And then so absolutely important as it was that her strength should support her in the morning! The man would not die even though he were left there without aid, to rid himself of the cataplasm as best he might. Was it absolutely necessary that she should disgrace herself?

But she could not even procure the means of disgracing herself, if that telling her story to the night porter would have been a disgrace. She did not find him, and at last resolved to make her way back to her own room without further quest. She began to think that she had done all that she could do. No man was ever killed by a mustard plaster on his throat. His discomfort at the worst would not be worse than hers had been—or, too probably, than that of her poor husband. So she went back up the stairs and along the passages, and made her way on this occasion to the door of her room without any difficulty. The way was so well known to her that she could not but wonder that she had failed before. But now her hands had been empty, and her eyes had been at her full command. She looked up, and there was the number, very manifest on this occasion—333. She opened the door most gently, thinking that her husband might be sleeping as soundly as that other man had slept, and she crept into the room.

CHAPTER III. MRS. BROWN ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE.

But her husband was not sleeping. He was not even in bed, as she had left him. She found him sitting there before the fireplace, on which one half-burned log still retained a spark of what had once pretended to be a fire. Nothing more wretched than his appearance could be imagined. There was a single lighted candle on the table, on which he was leaning with his two elbows, while his head rested between his hands. He had on a dressing-gown over his nightshirt, but otherwise was not clothed. He shivered audibly, or rather shook himself with the cold, and made the table to chatter, as she entered the room. Then he groaned, and let his head fall from his hands on to the table. It occurred to her at the moment, as she recognized the tone of his querulous voice, and as she saw the form of his neck, that she must have been deaf and blind when she had mistaken that stalwart stranger for her husband. "O my dear," she said, "why are you not in bed?" He answered nothing in words, but only groaned again. "Why did you get up? I left you warm and comfortable."

"Where have you been all night?" he half whispered, half croaked, with an agonizing effort. "I have been looking for the mustard."

"Have been looking all night, and haven't found it? Where have you been?"

She refused to speak a word to him till she had got him into bed, and then she told her story. But, alas! that which she told was not the true story. As she was persuading him to go back to his rest, and while she arranged the clothes again around him, she with difficulty made up her mind as to what she would do and what she would say. Living or dying, he must be made to start for Thompson Hall at half past five on the next morning. It was no

longer a question of the amenities of Christmas, no longer a mere desire to satisfy the family ambition of her own people, no longer an anxiety to see her new brother-in-law. She was conscious that there was in that house one whom she had deeply injured, and from whose vengeance—even from whose aspect—she must fly. How could she endure to see that face which she was so well sure that she would recognize, or to hear the slightest sound of that voice which would be quite familiar to her ears, though it had never spoken a word in her hearing? She must certainly fly on the wings of the earliest train which would carry her toward the old house; but in order that she might do so, she must propitiate her husband.

So she told her story. She had gone forth, as he had bade her, in search of the mustard, and then had suddenly lost her way. Up and down the house she had wandered, perhaps nearly a dozen times. "Had she met no one?" he asked, in that raspy, husky whisper. "Surely there must have been some one about the hotel! Nor was it possible that she could have been roaming about all those hours." "Only one hour, my dear," she said. Then there was a question about the duration of time, in which both of them waxed angry; and as she became angry, her husband waxed stronger, and as he became violent beneath the clothes, the comfortable idea returned to her that he was not perhaps so ill as he would seem to be. She found herself driven to tell him something about the porter, having to account for that lapse of time by explaining how she had driven the poor man to search for the handkerchief which she had never lost.

"Why did you not tell him you wanted the mustard?"

"My dear!"

"Why not? There is nothing to be ashamed of in wanting mustard."

"At one o'clock in the morning! I couldn't do it. To tell you the truth, he wasn't very civil, and I thought that he was—perhaps a little tipsy. Now, my dear, do go to sleep."

"Why didn't you get the mustard?"

"There was none there—nowhere at all about the room. I went down again and searched everywhere. That's what took me so long. They always lock up those kind of things at these French hotels. They are too close-fisted to leave anything out. When you first spoke of it I knew that it would be gone when I got there. Now, my dear, do go to sleep, because we positively must start in the morning."

"That is impossible," said he, jumping up in the bed.

"We must go, my dear. I say that we must go. After all that has passed, I wouldn't not be with Uncle John and my cousin Robert to-morrow evening for more—more—more than I would venture to say."

"Bother!" he exclaimed.

"It's all very well for you to say that, Charles, but you don't know. I say that we must go to-morrow, and we will."

"I do believe you want to kill me, Mary."

"That is very cruel, Charles, and most false, and most unjust. As for making you ill, nothing could be so bad for you as this wretched{36} place, where nobody can get warm either day or night. If anything will cure your throat for you at once, it will be the sea air. And only think how much more comfortable they can make you at Thompson Hall than anywhere in this country. I have so set my heart upon it, Charles, that I will do it. If we are not there to-morrow night, Uncle John won't consider us as belonging to the family."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Jane told me so in her letter. I wouldn't let you know before because I thought it so unjust. But that has been the reason why I've been so earnest about it all through."

It was a thousand pities that so good a woman should have been driven by the sad stress of circumstances to tell so many fibs. One after another she was compelled to invent them, that there might be a way open to her of escaping the horrors of a prolonged sojourn in that hotel. At length, after much grumbling, he became silent, and she trusted that he was sleeping. He had not as yet said that he would start at the required hour in the morning, but she was perfectly determined in her own mind that he should be made to do so. As he lay there motionless, and as she wandered about the room pretending to pack her things, she more than once almost resolved that she would tell him everything. Surely then he would be ready to make any effort. But there came upon her an idea that he might perhaps fail to see all the circumstances, and that, so failing, he would insist on remaining that he might tender some apology to the injured gentleman. An apology might have been very well had she not left him there in his misery; but what apology would be possible now? She would have to see him and speak to him, and every one in the hotel would know every detail of the story. Every one in France would know that it was she who had gone to the strange man's bedside and put the mustard plaster on the strange man's throat in the dead of night! She could not tell the story even to her husband, lest even her husband should betray her.

Her own sufferings at the present moment were not light. In her perturbation of mind she had foolishly resolved that she would not herself go to bed. The tragedy of the night had seemed to her too deep for personal comfort. And then, how would it be were she to sleep, and have no one to call her? It was imperative that she should have all her powers ready for thoroughly arousing him. It occurred to her that the servant of the hotel would certainly run her too short of time. She had to work for herself and for him too, and therefore she would not sleep. But she was very cold, and she put on first a shawl over her dressing-gown and then a cloak. She could not consume all the remaining hours of the night in packing one bag and one portmanteau; so that at last she sat down on the narrow red cotton velvet sofa, and, looking at her watch, perceived that as yet it was not much past two o'clock. How was she to get through those other three long, tedious, chilly hours?

Then there came a voice from the bed,—"Ain't you coming?"

"I hoped you were asleep, my dear."

"I haven't been asleep at all. You'd better come, if you don't mean to make yourself as ill as I am."

"You are not so very bad, are you, darling?"

"I don't know what you call bad. I never felt my throat so choked in my life before." Still as she listened she thought that she remembered his throat to have been more choked. If the husband of her bosom could play with her feelings and deceive her on such an occasion as this—then—then—then she thought that she would rather not have any husband of her bosom at all. But she did creep into bed, and lay down beside him without saying another word.

Of course she slept, but her sleep was not the sleep of the blest. At every striking of the clock in the quadrangle she would start up in alarm, fearing that she had let the time go by. Though the night was so short, it was very long to her. But he slept like an infant. She could hear from his breathing that he was not quite so well as she could wish him to be, but still he was resting in beautiful tranquillity. Not once did he move when she started up, as she did so frequently. Orders had been given and repeated over and over again that they should be called at five. The man in the office had almost been angry as he assured Mrs. Brown for the fourth time that monsieur and madame would most assuredly be wakened at the appointed time. But still she would trust to no one, and was up and about the room before the clock had struck half past four. In her heart of hearts she was very tender toward her husband. Now, in order that he might feel a gleam of warmth while he was dressing himself, she collected together the fragments of half-burned wood, and endeavored to make a little fire. Then she took out from her bag a small pot and a patent lamp and some chocolate, and prepared for him a warm drink, so that he might have it instantly as he was awakened. She would do anything for him in the way of ministering to his comfort—only he must go! Yes, he certainly must go!

And then she wondered how that strange man was bearing himself at the present moment. She would fain have ministered to him too had it been possible; but, ah! it was so impossible! Probably before this he would have been aroused from his

troubled slumbers. But then—how aroused? At what time in the night would the burning heat upon his chest have awakened him to a sense of torture which must have been so altogether incomprehensible to him? Her strong imagination showed to her a clear picture of the scene—clear, though it must have been done in the dark. How he must have tossed and hurled himself under the clothes! how those strong knees must have worked themselves up and down before the potent god of sleep would allow him to return to perfect consciousness! how his fingers, restrained by no reason, would have trampled over his feverish throat, scattering everywhere that unhappy poultice! Then when he should have sat up wide awake, but still in the dark—with her mind's eye she saw it all—feeling that some fire as from the infernal regions had fallen upon him, but whence he would know not, how fiercely wild would be the working of his spirit! Ah, now she knew, now she felt, now she acknowledged, how bound she had been to awaken him at the moment, whatever might have been the personal inconvenience to herself! In such a position what would he do—or rather what had he done? She could follow much of it in her own thoughts: how he would scramble madly from his bed, and, with one hand still on his throat, would snatch hurriedly at the matches with the other. How the light would come, and how then he would rush to the mirror. Ah, what a sight he would behold! She could see it all, to the last wide-spread daub.

But she could not see, she could not tell herself, what in such a position a man would do; at any rate, not what that man would do. Her husband, she thought, would tell his wife, and then the two of them, between them, would—put up with it.

There are misfortunes which, if they be published, are simply aggravated by ridicule. But she remembered the features of the stranger as she had seen them at that instant in which she had dropped his beard, and she thought that there was a ferocity in them, a certain tenacity of self-importance, which would not permit their owner to endure such treatment in silence. Would he not storm and rage, and ring the bell, and call all Paris to witness his revenge?

But the storming and the raging had not reached her yet, and now it wanted but a quarter to five. In three-quarters of an hour they would be in that demi-omnibus which they had ordered for themselves, and in half an hour after that they would be flying toward Thompson Hall. Then she allowed herself to think of those coming comforts—of those comforts so sweet, if only they would come! That very day now present to her was the 24th December, and on that very evening she would be sitting in Christmas joy among all her uncles and cousins, holding her new brother-in-law affectionately by the hand. Oh, what a change from Pandemonium to Paradise! from that wretched room, from that miserable house in which there was such ample cause for fear, to all the domestic Christmas bliss of the home of the Thompsons! She resolved that she would not, at any rate, be deterred by any light opposition on the part of her husband. "It wants just a quarter to five," she said, putting her hand steadily upon his shoulder, "and I'll get a cup of chocolate for you, so that you may get up comfortably."

"I've been thinking about it," he said, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands. "It will be so much better to go over by the mail-train to-night. We should be in time for Christmas just the same."

"That will not do at all," she answered, energetically. "Come, Charles, after all the trouble, do not disappoint me."

"It is such a horrid grind."

"Think what I have gone through—what I have done for you! In twelve hours we shall be there, among them all. You won't be so little like a man as not to go on now." He threw himself back upon the bed, and tried to re-adjust the clothes around his neck. "No, Charles, no," she continued; "not if I know it. Take your chocolate and get up. There is not a moment to be lost." With that she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and made him clearly understand that he would not be allowed to take further rest in that bed. Grumbling, sulky, coughing continually, and declaring that life under such circumstances was not worth having, he did at last get up and dress himself. When once she knew that he was obeying her, she became again tender to him, and certainly took much more than her own share of the trouble of the proceedings. Long before the time was up she was ready, and the porter had been summoned to take the luggage down-stairs. When the man came, she was rejoiced to see that it was not he whom she had met among the passages during her nocturnal rambles. He shouldered the box, and told them that they would find coffee and bread and butter in the small salle à manger below.

"I told you that it would be so, when you would boil that stuff," said the ungrateful man, who had nevertheless swallowed the hot chocolate when it was given to him.

They followed their luggage down into the hall; but as she went, at every step, the lady looked around her. She dreaded the sight of that porter of the night; she feared lest some potential authority of the hotel should come to her and ask her some horrid question; but of all her fears her greatest fear was that there should arise before her an apparition of that face which she had seen recumbent on its pillow.

As they passed the door of the great salon, Mr. Brown looked in.

"Why, there it is still!" said he.

"What?" said she, trembling in every limb.

"The mustard pot."

"They have put it in there since," she exclaimed, energetically, in her despair. "But never mind. The omnibus is here. Come away." And she absolutely took him by the arm.

But at that moment a door behind them opened, and Mrs. Brown heard herself called by her name. And there was the night porter —with a handkerchief in his hand. But the further doings of that morning must be told in a farther chapter.

CHAPTER IV. MRS. BROWN DOES ESCAPE.

It had been visible to Mrs. Brown from the first moment of her arrival on the ground floor that "something was the matter," if we may be allowed to use such a phrase; and she felt all but convinced that this something had reference to her. She fancied that the people of the hotel were looking at her as she swallowed, or tried to swallow, her coffee. When her husband was paying the bill there was something disagreeable in the eye of the man who was taking the money. Her sufferings were very great, and no one sympathized with her. Her husband was quite at his ease, except that he was complaining of the cold. When she was anxious to get him out into the carriage, he still stood there, leisurely arranging shawl after shawl around his throat. "You can do that quite as well in the omnibus," she had just said to him, very crossly, when there appeared upon the scene through a side door that very night porter whom she dreaded with a soiled pocket-handkerchief in his hand.

Even before the sound of her own name met her ears, Mrs. Brown knew it all. She understood the full horror of her position from that man's hostile face, and from the little article which he held in his hand. If during the watches of the night she had had money in her pocket, if she had made a friend of this greedy fellow by well-timed liberality, all might have been so different! But she reflected that she had allowed him to go unfee'd after all his trouble, and she knew that he was her enemy. It was the handkerchief that she feared. She thought that she might have brazened out anything but that. No one had seen her enter or leave that strange man's room. No one had seen her dip her hands in that jar. She had, no doubt, been found wandering about the house while the slumberer had been made to suffer so strangely, and there might have been suspicion, and perhaps accusation. But she would have been ready with frequent protestations to deny all charges made against her, and though no one might have believed her, no one could have convicted her. Here, however, was evidence against which she would be unable to stand for a moment. At the first glance she acknowledged the potency of that damning morsel of linen. During all the horrors of the night she had never given a thought

to the handkerchief, and yet she ought to have known that the evidence it would bring against her was palpable and certain. Her name, "M. Brown," was plainly written on the corner. What a fool she had been not to have thought of this! Had she but remembered the plain marking which she, as a careful, well-conducted British matron, had put upon all her clothes, she would at any hazard have recovered the article. Oh that she had waked the man, or bribed the porter, or even told her husband! But now she was, as it were, friendless, without support, without a word that she could say in her own defence, convicted of having committed this assault upon a strange man as he slept in his own bedroom, and then of having left him! The thing must be explained by the truth; but how to explain such truth, how to tell such story in a way to satisfy injured folk, and she with only barely time sufficient to catch the train! Then it occurred to her that they could have no legal right to stop her because the pocket-handkerchief had been found in a strange gentleman's bedroom. "Yes, it is mine," she said, turning to her husband, as the porter, with a loud voice, asked if she were not Madame Brown. "Take it, Charles, and come on." Mr. Brown naturally stood still in astonishment. He did put out his hand, but the porter would not allow the evidence to pass so readily out of his custody.

"What does it all mean?" asked Mr. Brown.

"A gentleman has been—eh—eh—Something has been done to a gentleman in his bedroom," said the clerk.

"Something done to a gentleman!" repeated Mr. Brown.

"Something very bad indeed," said the porter. "Look here"; and he showed the condition of the handkerchief.

"Charles, we shall lose the train," said the affrighted wife.

"What the mischief does it all mean?" demanded the husband.

"Did madame go into the gentlema{50}n's room?" asked the clerk. Then there was an awful silence, and all eyes were fixed upon the lady.

"What does it all mean?" demanded the husband. "Did you go into anybody's room?"

"I did," said Mrs. Brown with much dignity, looking round upon her enemies as a stag at bay will look upon the hounds which are attacking him. "Give me the handkerchief." But the night porter quickly put it behind his back. "Charles, we cannot allow ourselves to be delayed. You shall write a letter to the keeper of the hotel explaining it all." Then she essayed to swim out through the front door into the courtyard, in which the vehicle was waiting for them. But three or four men and women interposed themselves, and even her husband did not seem quite ready to continue his journey. "To-night is Christmas-eve," said Mrs. Brown, "and we shall not be at Thompson Hall. Think of my sister!"

"Why did you go into the man's bedroom, my dear?" whispered Mr. Brown in English.

But the porter heard the whisper, and understood the language —the porter who had not been "tipped." "Ye'es—vy?" asked the porter.

"It was a mistake, Charles; there is not a moment to lose. I can explain it all to you in the carriage." Then the clerk suggested that madame had better postpone her journey a little. The gentleman up-stairs had certainly been very badly treated, and had demanded to know why so great an outrage had been perpetrated. The clerk said that he did not wish to send for the police (here Mrs. Brown gasped terribly, and threw herself on her husband's shoulder), but he did not think he could allow the party to go till the gentleman up-stairs had received some satisfaction. It had now become clearly impossible that the journey could be made by the early train. Even Mrs. Brown gave it up herself, and demanded of her husband that she should be taken back to her bedroom.

"But what is to be said to the gentleman?" asked the porter.

Of course it was impossible that Mrs. Brown should be made to tell her story there in the presence of them all. The clerk, when he found he had succeeded in preventing her from leaving the house, was satisfied with a promise from Mr. Brown that he would inquire from his wife what were these mysterious circumstances, and would then come down to the office and give some explanation. If it were necessary, he would see the strange gentleman—whom he now ascertained to be a certain Mr. Jones, returning from the east of Europe. He learned also that this Mr. Jones had been most anxious to travel by that very morning train which he and his wife had intended to use; that Mr. Jones had been most particular in giving his orders accordingly; but that at the last moment he had declared himself to be unable even to dress himself, because of the injury which had been done him during the night. When Mr. Brown heard this from the clerk just before he was allowed to take his wife up-stairs, while she was sitting on a sofa in a corner with her face hidden, a look of awful gloom came over his own countenance. What could it be that his wife had done to the man, of so terrible a nature? "You had better come up with me," he said to her, with marital severity; and the poor cowed woman went with him tamely as might have done some patient Grizel. Not a word was spoken till they were in the room and the door was locked. "Now," said he, "what does it all mean?"

It was not till nearly two hours had passed that Mr. Brown came down the stairs very slowly, turning it all over in his mind. He had now gradually heard the absolute and exact truth, and had very gradually learned to believe it. It was first necessary that he should understand that his wife had told him many fibs during the night; but, as she constantly alleged to him when he complained of her conduct in this respect, they had all been told on his behalf. Had she not struggled to get the mustard for his comfort, and when she had secured the prize had she not hurried to put it on—as she had fondly thought—his throat? And though she had fibbed to him afterward, had she not done so in order that he might not be troubled? "You are not angry with me because I was in that man's room?" she asked, looking full into his eyes, but not quite without a sob. He paused a moment, and then declared, with something of a true husband's confidence in his tone, that he was not in the least angry with her on that account. Then she kissed him, and bade him remember that, after all, no one could really injure them. "What harm has been done, Charles? The gentleman won't die because he has had a mustard plaster on his throat. The worst is about Uncle John and dear Jane. They do think so much of Christmas-eve at Thompson Hall!"

Mr. Brown, when he again found himself in the clerk's office, requested that his card might be taken up to Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones had sent down his own card, which was handed to Mr. Brown: "Mr. Barnaby Jones." "And how was it all, sir?" asked the clerk, in a whisper—a whisper which had at the same time something of authoritative demand and something also of submissive respect. The clerk, of course, was anxious to know the mystery. It is hardly too much to say that every one in that vast hotel was by this time anxious to have the mystery unravelled. But Mr. Brown would tell nothing to any one. "It is merely a matter to be explained between me and Mr. Jones," he said. The card was taken up-stairs, and after a while he was ushered into Mr. Jones's room. It was, of course, that very 353 with which the reader is already acquainted. There was a fire burning, and the remains of Mr. Jones's breakfast were on the table. He was sitting in his dressing-gown and slippers, with his shirt open in the front, and a silk handkerchief very loosely covering his throat. Mr. Brown, as he entered the room, of course looked with considerable anxiety at the gentleman of whose condition he had heard so sad an account; but he could only observe some considerable stiffness of movement and demeanor as Mr. Jones turned his head round to greet him.

"This has been a very disagreeable accident, Mr. Jones," said the husband of the lady.

"Accident! I don't know how it could have been an accident. It has been a most—most-most—a most monstrous—er—er—I must say, interference with a gentleman's privacy and personal comfort."

"Quite so, Mr. Jones, but—on the part of the lady, who is my wife —"

"So I understand. I myself am about to become a married man, and I can understand what your feelings must be. I wish to say as little as possible to harrow them." Here Mr. Brown bowed. "But—there's the fact. She did do it."
"She thought it was—me!"
"What!"
"I give you my word as a gentleman, Mr. Jones. When she was putting that mess upon you, she thought it was me! She did indeed."
Mr. Jones looked at his new acquaintance and shook his head. He did not think it possible that any woman would make such a mistake as that.
"I had a very bad sore throat," continued Mr. Brown, "and indeed you may perceive it still"—in saying this he perhaps aggravated a little the sign of his distemper—"and I asked Mrs. Brown to go down and get one—just what she put on you."
"I wish you'd had it," said Mr. Jones, putting his hand up to his neck.
"I wish I had, for your sake as well as mine, and for hers, poor woman. I don't know when she will get over the shock."
"I don't know when I shall. And it has stopped me on my journey. I was to have been to-night, this very night, this Christmas-eve, with the young lady I am engaged to marry. Of course I couldn't travel. The extent of the injury done nobody can imagine at present."
"It has been just as bad to me, sir. We were to have been with our family this Christmas-eve. There were particular reasons—most particular. We were only hindered from going by hearing of your condition."
"Why did she come into my room at all? I can't understand that. A lady always knows her own room at a hotel."
"358—that's yours; 333—that's ours. Don't you see how easy it was? She had lost her way, and she was a little afraid lest the thing should fall down."
"I wish it had with all my heart."
"That's how it was. Now I'm sure, Mr. Jones, you'll take a lady's apology. It was a most unfortunate mistake—most unfortunate; but what more can be said?"
Mr. Jones gave himself up to reflection for a{58} few moments before he replied to this. He supposed that he was bound to believe the story as far as it went. At any rate, he did not know how he could say that he did not believe it. It seemed to him to be almost incredible, especially incredible in regard to that personal mistake, for, except that they both had long beards and brown beards, Mr. Jones thought that there was no point of resemblance between himself and Mr. Brown. But still, even that, he felt, must be accepted. But then why had he been left, deserted, to undergo all those torments? "She found out her mistake at last, I suppose?" he said.
"Oh, yes."
"Why didn't she wake a fellow and take it off again?"
"Ah!"
"She can't have cared very much for a man's comfort, when she went away and left him like that."
"Ah! there was the difficulty, Mr. Jones."
"Difficulty! Who was it that had done it? To come to me in my bedroom in the middle of the night and put that thing on me, and then leave it there and say nothing about it! It seems to me deuced like a practical joke."
"No, Mr. Jones."
"That's the way I look at it," said Mr. Jones, plucking up his courage.
"There isn't a woman in all England or in all France less likely to do such a thing than my wife. She's as steady as a rock, Mr. Jones, and would no more go into another gentleman's bedroom in joke than—Oh dear no! You're going to be a married man yourself."
"Unless all this makes a difference," said Mr. Jones, almost in tears. "I had sworn that I would be with her this Christmas-eve."
"O Mr. Jones, I cannot believe that will interfere with your happiness. How could you think that your wife, as is to be, would do such a thing as that in joke?"
"She wouldn't do it at all, joke or any way."
"How can you tell what accident might happen to any one?"
"She'd have wakened the man, then, afterward. I'm sure she would. She would never have left him to suffer in that way. Her heart is too soft. Why didn't she send you to wake me and explain it all? That's what my Jane would have done; and I should have gone and wakened him. But the whole thing is impossible," he said, shaking his head as he remembered that he and his Jane were not in a condition as yet to undergo any such mutual trouble. At last Mr. Jones was brought to acknowledge that nothing more could be done. The lady had sent her apology and told her story, and he must bear the trouble and inconvenience to which she had subjected him. He still, however, had his own opinion about her conduct generally, and could not be brought to give any sign of amity. He simply bowed when Mr. Brown was hoping to induce him to shake hands, and sent no word of pardon to the great offender.
The matter, however, was so far concluded that there was no further question of police interference, nor any doubt but that the lady, with her husband, was to be allowed to leave Paris by the night train. The nature of the accident probably became known to all. Mr. Brown was interrogated by many, and though he professed to declare that he would answer no question, nevertheless he found it better to tell the clerk something of the truth than to allow the matter to be shrouded in mystery. It is to be feared that Mr. Jones, who did not once show himself through the day, but who employed the hours in endeavoring to assuage the injury done him, still lived in the conviction that the lady had played a practical joke on him. But the subject of such a joke never talks about it, and Mr. Jones could not be induced to speak even by the friendly adherence of the night porter.
Mrs. Brown also clung to the seclusion of her own bedroom, never once stirring from it till the time came in which she was to be taken down to the omnibus. Up-stairs she ate her meals, and up-stairs she passed her time in packing and unpacking, and in requesting that telegrams might be sent repeatedly to Thompson Hall. In the course of the day two such telegrams were sent, in the latter of which the Thompson family were assured that the Browns would arrive probably in time for breakfast on Christmas-day, certainly in time for church. She asked more than once tenderly after Mr. Jones's welfare, but could obtain no information. "He was very cross, and that's all I know about it," said Mr. Brown. Then she made a remark as to the gentleman's Christian name, which appeared on the card as "Barnaby." "My sister's husband's name will be Burnaby," she said. "And this man's Christian name is Barnaby; that's all the difference," said her husband, with ill-timed jocularity.
We all know how people under a cloud are apt to fail in asserting their personal dignity. On the former day a separate vehicle had been ordered by Mr. Brown to take himself and his wife to the station, but now, after his misfortunes, he contented himself with such provision as the people at the hotel might make for him. At the appointed hour he brought his wife down, thickly veiled. There were many strangers, as she passed through the hall, ready to look at the lady who had done that wonderful thing in the dead of night, but none could see a feature of her face as she stepped across the hall and was hurried into the omnibus. And there were many eyes also on Mr. Jones, who followed her very quickly, for he also, in spite of his sufferings, was leaving Paris on the evening in order that he might be with his English friends on Christmas-day. He, as he went through the crowd, assumed an air of great dignity, to which, perhaps, something was added by his endeavors as he walked to save his poor throat from irritation. He, too, got into the same omnibus, stumbling over the feet of his enemy in the dark. At the station they got their tickets, one close after the other, and then were brought into each other's presence in the waiting-room. I think it must be acknowledged that here Mr. Jones was conscious not only of her presence, but of her consciousness of his presence, and that he assumed an attitude as though he should have said, "Now do you think it possible for me

to believe that you mistook me for your husband?" She was perfectly quiet, but sat through that quarter of an hour with her face continually veiled. Mr. Brown made some little overture of conversation to Mr. Jones, but Mr. Jones, though he did mutter some reply, showed plainly enough that he had no desire for further intercourse. Then came the accustomed stampede, the awful rush, the internecine struggle in which seats had to be found. Seats, I fancy, are regularly found, even by the most tardy, but it always appears that every British father and every British husband is actuated at these stormy moments by a conviction that unless he proves himself a very Hercules he and his daughters and his wife will be left desolate in Paris. Mr. Brown was quite Herculean, carrying two bags and a hatbox in his own hands, besides the cloaks, the coats, the rugs, the sticks, and the umbrellas. But when he had got himself and his wife well seated, with their faces to the engine, with a corner seat for her—there was Mr. Jones immediately opposite to her. Mr. Jones, as soon as he perceived the inconvenience of his position, made a scramble for another place, but he was too late. In that contiguity the journey as far as Calais had to be made. She, poor woman, never once took up her veil. There he sat, without closing an eye, stiff as a ramrod, sometimes showing by little uneasy gestures that the trouble at his neck was still there, but never speaking a word, and hardly moving a limb.

Crossing from Calais to Dover the lady was, of course, separated from her victim. The passage was very bad, and she more than once reminded her husband how well it would have been with them now had they pursued their journey as she had intended—as though they had been detained in Paris by his fault! Mr. Jones, as he laid himself down on his back, gave himself up to wondering whether any man before him had ever been made subject to such absolute injustice. Now and again he put his hand up to his own beard, and began to doubt whether it could have been moved, as it must have been moved, without waking him. What if chloroform had been used? Many such suspicions crossed his mind during the misery of that passage.

They were again together in the same railway carriage from Dover to London. They had now got used to the close neighborhood, and knew how to endure each the presence of the other. But as yet Mr. Jones had never seen the lady's face. He longed to know what were the features of the woman who had been so blind—if indeed that story were true. Or if it were not true, of what like was the woman who would dare in the middle of the night to play such a trick as that? But still she kept her veil close over her face.

From Cannon Street the Browns took their departure in a cab for the Liverpool Street Station, whence they would be conveyed by the Eastern Counties Railway to Stratford. Now, at any rate, their troubles were over. They would be in ample time not only for Christmas-day church, but for Christmas-day breakfast. "It will be just the same as getting in there last night," said Mr. Brown, as he walked across the platform to place his wife in the carriage for Stratford. She entered it the first, and as she did so, there she saw Mr. Jones seated in{66} the corner! Hitherto she had borne his presence well, but now she could not restrain herself from a little start and a little scream. He bowed his head very slightly, as though acknowledging the compliment, and then down she dropped her veil. When they arrived at Stratford, the journey being over in a quarter of an hour, Jones was out of the carriage even before the Browns.

"There is Uncle John's carriage," said Mrs. Brown, thinking that now, at any rate, she would be able to free herself from the presence of this terrible stranger. No doubt he was a handsome man to look at, but on no face so sternly hostile had she ever before fixed her eyes. She did not, perhaps, reflect that the owner of no other face had ever been so deeply injured by herself.

CHAPTER V. MRS. BROWN AT THOMPSON HALL.

"Please, sir, we were to ask for Mr. Jones," said the servant, putting his head into the carriage after both Mr. and Mrs. Brown had seated themselves.

"Mr. Jones!" exclaimed the husband.

"Why ask for Mr. Jones?" demanded the wife. The servant was about to tender some explanation, when Mr. Jones stepped up and said that he was Mr. Jones. "We are going to Thompson Hall," said the lady, with great vigor.

"So am I," said Mr. Jones, with much dignity. It was, however, arranged that he should sit with the coachman, as there was a rumble behind for the other servant. The luggage was put into a cart, and away all went for Thompson Hall.

"What do you think about it, Mary?" whispered Mr. Brown, after a pause. He was evidently awe-struck by the horror of the occasion.

"I cannot make it out at all. What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think. Jones going to Thompson Hall!"

"He's a very good-looking young man," said Mrs. Brown.

"Well—that's as people think. A stiff, stuck-up fellow, I should say. Up to this moment he has never forgiven you for what you did to him."

"Would you have forgiven his wife, Charles, if she'd done it to you?"

"He hasn't got a wife—yet."

"How do you know?"

"He is coming home now to be married," said Mr. Brown. "He expects to meet the young lady this very Christmas-day. He told me so. That was one of the reasons why he was so angry at being stopped by what you did last night."

"I suppose he knows Uncle John, or he wouldn't be going to the Hall," said Mrs. Brown.

"I can't make it out," said Mr. Brown, shaking his head.

"He looks quite like a gentleman," said Mrs. Brown, "though he has been so stiff. Jones! Barnaby Jones! You're sure it was Barnaby?"

"That was the name on the card."

"Not Burnaby?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"It was Barnaby Jones on the card—just the same as 'Barnaby Rudge'; and as for looking like a gentleman, I'm by no means quite so sure. A gentleman takes an apology when it's offered."

"Perhaps, my dear, that depends on the condition of his throat. If you had had a mustard plaster on all night, you might not have liked it. But here we are at Thompson Hall at last."

Thompson Hall was an old brick mansion, standing within a huge iron gate, with a gravel sweep before it. It had stood there before Stratford was a town, or even a suburb, and had then been known by the name of Bow Place. But it had been in the hands of the present family for the last thirty years, and was now known far and wide as Thompson Hall—a comfortable, roomy, old-fashioned place, perhaps a little dark and dull to look at, but much more substantially built than most of our modern villas. Mrs. Brown jumped with alacrity from the carriage, and with a quick step entered the home of her forefathers. Her husband followed her more leisurely; but he too felt that he was at home at Thompson Hall. Then Mr. Jones walked in also; but he looked as though he were not at all at home. It was still very early, and no one of the family was as yet down. In these circumstances it was almost necessary that something should be said to Mr. Jones.

"Do you know Mr. Thompson?" asked Mr. Brown.

"I never had the pleasure of seeing him—as yet," answered Mr. Jones, very stiffly.

"Oh—I didn't know. Because you said you were coming here."

"And I have come here. Are you friends of Mr. Thompson?"

"Oh dear yes," said Mrs. Brown. "I was a Thompson myself before I married."

"Oh—indeed!" said Mr. Jones. "How very odd!—very odd indeed."

During this time the luggage was being brought into the house, and two old family{71} servants were offering them assistance. Would the new-comers like to go up to their bed-rooms? Then the housekeeper, Mrs. Green, intimated with a wink that Miss Jane

would, she was sure, be down quite immediately. The present moment, however, was still very unpleasant. The lady probably had made her guess as to the mystery, but the two gentlemen were still altogether in the dark. Mrs. Brown had no doubt declared her parentage, but Mr. Jones, with such a multitude of strange facts crowding on his mind, had been slow to understand her. Being somewhat suspicious by nature, he was beginning to think whether possibly the mustard had been put by this lady on his throat with some reference to his connection with Thompson Hall. Could it be that she, for some reason of her own, had wished to prevent his coming, and had contrived this untoward stratagem out of her brain? or had she wished to make him ridiculous to the Thompson family, to whom, as a family, he was at present unknown? It was becoming more and more improbable to him that the whole thing should have been an accident. When, after the first horrid torments of that morning in which he had in his agony invoked the assistance of the night porter, he had begun to reflect on his situation, he had determined that it would be better that nothing further should be said about it. What would life be worth to him if he were to be known wherever he went as the man who had been mustard-plastered in the middle of the night by a strange lady? The worst of a practical joke is that the remembrance of the absurd condition sticks so long to the sufferer. At the hotel that night porter, who had possessed himself of the handkerchief, and had read the name, and had connected that name with the occupant of 333, whom he had found wandering about the house with some strange purpose, had not permitted the thing to sleep. The porter had pressed the matter home against the Browns, and had produced the interview which has been recorded. But during the whole of that day Mr. Jones had been resolving that he would never again either think of the Browns or speak of them. A great injury had been done to him—a most outrageous injustice; but it was a thing which had to be endured. A horrid woman had come across him like a nightmare. All he could do was to endeavor to forget the terrible visitation. Such had been his resolve, in making which he had passed that long day in Paris. And now the Browns had stuck to him from the moment of his leaving his room! He had been forced to travel with them, but had travelled with them as a stranger. He had tried to comfort himself with the reflection that at every fresh stage he would shake them off. In one railway after another the vicinity had been bad—but still they were strangers. Now he found himself in the same house with them, where of course the story would be told. Had not the thing been done on purpose that the story might be told there at Thompson Hall?

Mrs. Brown had acceded to the proposition of the housekeeper, and was about to be taken to her room, when there was heard a sound of footsteps along the passage above and on the stairs, and a young lady came bounding on to the scene. “You have all of you come a quarter of an hour earlier than we thought possible,” said the young lady. “I did so mean to be up to receive you!” With that she passed her sister on the stairs—for the young lady was Miss Jane Thompson, sister to our Mrs. Brown—and hurried down into the hall. Here Mr. Brown, who had ever been on affectionate terms with his sister-in-law, put himself forward to receive her embraces; but she, apparently not noticing him in her ardor, rushed on and threw herself on to the breast of the other gentleman. “This is my Charles,” she said. “O Charles, I thought you never would be here!”

Mr. Charles Burnaby Jones—for such was his name since he had inherited the Jones property in Pembrokeshire—received into his arms the ardent girl of his heart with all that love and devotion to which she was entitled, but could not do so without some external shrinking from her embrace. “O Charles, what is it?” she said.

“Nothing, dearest—only—only—” Then he looked piteously up into Mrs. Brown’s face, as though imploring her not to tell the story.

“Perhaps, Jane, you had better introduce us,” said Mrs. Brown.

“Introduce you! I thought you had been travelling together, and staying at the same hotel, and all that.”

“So we have; but people may be in the same hotel without knowing each other. And we have travelled all the way home with Mr. Jones without in the least knowing who he was.”

“How very odd! Do you mean you have never spoken?”

“Not a word,” said Mrs. Brown.

“I do so hope you’ll love each other,” said Jane.

“It sha’n’t be my fault if we don’t,” said Mrs. Brown.

“I’m sure it sha’n’t be mine,” said Mr. Brown, tendering his hand to the other gentleman. The various feelings of the moment were too much for Mr. Jones, and he could not respond quite as he should have done. But as he was taken up-stairs to his room, he determined that he would make the best of it.

The owner of the house was old Uncle John. He was a bachelor, and with him lived various members of the family. There was the great Thompson of them all, Cousin Robert, who was now member of Parliament for the Essex Flats; and young John, as a certain enterprising Thompson of the age of forty was usually called; and then there was old Aunt Bess; and among other young branches there was Miss Jane Thompson, who was now engaged to marry Mr. Charles Burnaby Jones. As it happened, no other member of the family had as yet seen Mr. Burnaby Jones, and he, being by nature of a{76} retiring disposition, felt himself to be ill at ease when he came into the breakfast parlor among all the Thompsons. He was known to be a gentleman of good family and ample means, and all the Thompsons had approved of the match; but during that first Christmas breakfast he did not seem to accept his condition jovially. His own Jane sat beside him, but then on the other side sat Mrs. Brown. She assumed an immediate intimacy—as women know how to do on such occasions—being determined from the very first to regard her sister’s husband as a brother; but he still feared her. She was still to him the woman who had come to him in the dead of night with that horrid mixture—and had then left him.

“It was so odd that both of you should have been detained on the very same day,” said Jane.

“Yes, it was odd,” said Mrs. Brown, with a smile, looking round upon her neighbor.

“It was abominably bad weather, you know,” said Brown.

“But you were both so determined to come,” said the old gentleman. “When we got the two telegrams at the same moment, we were sure that there had been some agreement between you.”

“Not exactly an agreement,” said Mrs. Brown; whereupon Mr. Jones looked as grim as death.

“I’m sure there is something more than we understand yet,” said the member of Parliament.

Then they all went to church, as a united family ought to do on Christmas-day, and came home to a fine old English early dinner at three o’clock,-a sirloin of beef a foot and a half broad, a turkey as big as an ostrich, a plum-pudding bigger than the turkey, and two or three dozen mince-pies. “That’s a very large bit of beef,” said Mr. Jones, who had not lived much in England latterly.

“It won’t look so large,” said the old gentleman, “when all our friends down-stairs have had their say to it.” “A plum pudding on Christmas-day can’t be too big,” he said again, “if the cook will but take time enough over it. I never knew a bit to go to waste yet.{78}”

By this time there had been some explanation as to past events between the two sisters. Mrs. Brown had, indeed, told Jane all about it,—how ill her husband had been, how she had been forced to go down and look for the mustard, and then what she had done with the mustard.

“I don’t think they are a bit alike, you know, Mary, if you mean that,” said Jane.

“Well, no; perhaps not quite alike. I only saw his beard, you know. No doubt it was stupid, but I did it.”

“Why didn’t you take it off again?” asked the sister.

“O Jane, if you’d only think of it! Could you?” Then, of course, all that occurred was explained,—how they had been stopped on their journey, how Brown had made the best apology in his

power, and how Jones had travelled with them and had never spoken a word. The gentleman had only taken his new name a week since, but of course had had his new card printed immediately, “I’m sure I should have thought of it, if they hadn’t made a mistake of the first name. Charles said it was like Barnaby Rudge.”
“Not at all like Barnaby Rudge,” said Jane: “Charles Burnaby Jones is a very good name.”
“Very good indeed—and I’m sure that after a little bit he won’t be at all the worse for the accident.”
Before dinner the secret had been told no further, but still there had crept about among the Thompsons, and, indeed, down-stairs also among the retainers, a feeling that there was a secret. The old housekeeper was sure that Miss Mary, as she still called Mrs. Brown, had something to tell, if she could only be induced to tell it, and that this something had reference to Mr. Jones’s personal comfort. The head of the family, who was a sharp old gentleman, felt this also, and the member of Parliament, who had an idea that he especially should never be kept in the dark, was almost angry. Mr. Jones, suffering from some kindred feeling throughout the dinner, remained silent and unhappy. When two or three toasts had been drunk—the Queen’s health, the old gentleman’s health, the young couple’s health, Brown’s health, and the general health of all the Thompsons—then tongues were loosened and a question was asked. “I know that there has been something doing in Paris between these young people that we haven’t heard as yet,” said the uncle. Then Mrs. Brown laughed, and Jane, laughing too, gave Mr. Jones to understand that she, at any rate, knew all about it.
“If there is a mystery, I hope it will be told at once,” said the member of Parliament angrily.
“Come, Brown, what is it?” asked another male cousin.
“Well, there was an accident. I’d rather Jones should tell,” said he. Jones’s brow became blacker than thunder, but he did not say a word. “You mustn’t be angry with Mary,” Jane whispered into her lover’s ear.
“Come, Mary, you never were slow at talking,” said the uncle.
“I do hate this kind of thing,” said the member of Parliament.
“I will tell it all,” said Mrs. Brown, very nearly in tears, or else pretending to be very nearly in tears. “I know I was very wrong, and I do beg his pardon; and if he won’t say that he forgives me, I never shall be happy again.” Then she clasped her hands, and, turning round, looked him piteously in the face.
“Oh, yes; I do forgive you,” said Mr. Jones.
“My brother,” said she, throwing her arms round him and kissing him. He recoiled from the embrace, but I think that he attempted to return the kiss. “And now I will tell the whole story,” said Mrs. Brown. And she told it, acknowledging her fault with true contrition, and swearing that she would atone for it by life-long sisterly devotion.
“And you mustard-plastered the wrong man!” said the old gentleman, almost rolling off his chair with delight.
“I did,” said Mrs. Brown, sobbing; “and I think that no woman ever suffered as I suffered.”
“And Jones wouldn’t let you leave the hotel?”
“It was the handkerchief stopped us,” said Brown.
“If it had turned out to be anybody else,” said the member of Parliament, “the results might have been most serious—not to say discreditable.”
“That’s nonsense, Robert,” said Mrs. Brown, who was disposed to resent the use of so severe a word, even from the legislator cousin.
“In a strange gentleman’s bedroom!” he continued. “It only shows that what I have always said is quite true. You should never go to bed in a strange house without locking your door.”
Nevertheless it was a very jovial meeting, and before the evening was over Mr. Jones was happy, and had been brought to acknowledge that the mustard plaster would probably not do him any permanent injury.

The Tailor of Gloucester

Beatrix Potter

In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lappets—when gentlemen wore ruffles, and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta—there lived a tailor in Gloucester.

He sat in the window of a little shop in Westgate Street, cross-legged on a table, from morning till dark.

All day long while the light lasted he sewed and snippeted, piecing out his satin and pompadour, and lutestring; stuffs had strange names, and were very expensive in the days of the Tailor of Gloucester.

But although he sewed fine silk for his neighbours, he himself was very, very poor—a little old man in spectacles, with a pinched face, old crooked fingers, and a suit of thread-bare clothes.

He cut his coats without waste, according to his embroidered cloth; they were very small ends and snippets that lay about upon the table—"Too narrow breadths for nought—except waistcoats for mice," said the tailor.

One bitter cold day near Christmastime the tailor began to make a coat—a coat of cherry-coloured corded silk embroidered with pansies and roses, and a cream coloured satin waistcoat—trimmed with gauze and green worsted chenille—for the Mayor of Gloucester.

The tailor worked and worked, and he talked to himself. He measured the silk, and turned it round and round, and trimmed it into shape with his shears; the table was all littered with cherry-coloured snippets.

"No breadth at all, and cut on the cross; it is no breadth at all; tippets for mice and ribbons for mobs! for mice!" said the Tailor of Gloucester.

When the snow-flakes came down against the small leaded window-panes and shut out the light, the tailor had done his day's work; all the silk and satin lay cut out upon the table. There were twelve pieces for the coat and four pieces for the waistcoat; and there were pocket flaps and cuffs, and buttons all in order. For the lining of the coat there was fine yellow taffeta; and for the button-holes of the waistcoat, there was cherry-coloured twist. And everything was ready to sew together in the morning, all measured and sufficient—except that there was wanting just one single skein of cherry-coloured twisted silk.

The tailor came out of his shop at dark, for he did not sleep there at nights; he fastened the window and locked the door, and took away the key. No one lived there at night but little brown mice, and they run in and out without any keys!

For behind the wooden wainscots of all the old houses in Gloucester, there are little mouse staircases and secret trap-doors; and the mice run from house to house through those long narrow passages; they can run all over the town without going into the streets.

But the tailor came out of his shop, and shuffled home through the snow. He lived quite near by in College Court, next the doorway to College Green; and although it was not a big house, the tailor was so poor he only rented the kitchen.

He lived alone with his cat; it was called Simpkin.

Now all day long while the tailor was out at work, Simpkin kept house by himself; and he also was fond of the mice, though he gave them no satin for coats!

"Miaw?" said the cat when the tailor opened the door. "Miaw?"

The tailor replied—"Simpkin, we shall make our fortune, but I am worn to a ravelling. Take this groat (which is our last fourpence) and Simpkin, take a china pipkin; buy a penn'orth of bread, a penn'orth of milk and a penn'orth of sausages. And oh, Simpkin, with the last penny of our fourpence buy me one penn'orth of cherry-coloured silk. But do not lose the last penny of the fourpence, Simpkin, or I am undone and worn to a thread-paper, for I have NO MORE TWIST."

Then Simpkin again said, "Miaw?" and took the groat and the pipkin, and went out into the dark.

The tailor was very tired and beginning to be ill. He sat down by the hearth and talked to himself about that wonderful coat.

"I shall make my fortune—to be cut bias—the Mayor of Gloucester is to be married on Christmas Day in the morning, and he hath ordered a coat and an embroidered waistcoat—to be lined with yellow taffeta—and the taffeta sufficeth; there is no more left over in snippets than will serve to make tippets for mice——"

Then the tailor started; for suddenly, interrupting him, from the dresser at the other side of the kitchen came a number of little noises—

Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip!

"Now what can that be?" said the Tailor of Gloucester, jumping up from his chair. The dresser was covered with crockery and pipkins, willow pattern plates, and tea-cups and mugs.

The tailor crossed the kitchen, and stood quite still beside the dresser, listening, and peering through his spectacles. Again from under a tea-cup, came those funny little noises—

Tip tap, tip tap, Tip tap tip!

"This is very peculiar," said the Tailor of Gloucester; and he lifted up the tea-cup which was upside down.

Out stepped a little live lady mouse, and made a curtsey to the tailor! Then she hopped away down off the dresser, and under the wainscot.

The tailor sat down again by the fire, warming his poor cold hands, and mumbling to himself——

"The waistcoat is cut out from peach-coloured satin—tambour stitch and rose-buds in beautiful floss silk. Was I wise to entrust my last fourpence to Simpkin? One-and-twenty button-holes of cherry-coloured twist!"

But all at once, from the dresser, there came other little noises:

Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip!

"This is passing extraordinary!" said the Tailor of Gloucester, and turned over another tea-cup, which was upside down.

Out stepped a little gentleman mouse, and made a bow to the tailor!

And then from all over the dresser came a chorus of little tappings, all sounding together, and answering one another, like watch-beetles in an old worm-eaten window-shutter—

Tip tap, tip tap, tip tap tip!

And out from under tea-cups and from under bowls and basins, stepped other and more little mice who hopped away down off the dresser and under the wainscot.

The tailor sat down, close over the fire, lamenting—"One-and-twenty button-holes of cherry-coloured silk! To be finished by noon of Saturday: and this is Tuesday evening. Was it right to let loose those mice, undoubtedly the property of Simpkin? Alack, I am undone, for I have no more twist!"

The little mice came out again, and listened to the tailor; they took notice of the pattern of that wonderful coat. They whispered to one another about the taffeta lining, and about little mouse tippets.

And then all at once they all ran away together down the passage behind the wainscot, squeaking and calling to one another, as they ran from house to house; and not one mouse was left in the tailor's kitchen when Simpkin came back with the pipkin of milk!

Simpkin opened the door and bounced in, with an angry "G-r-r-miaw!" like a cat that is vexed: for he hated the snow, and there was snow in his ears, and snow in his collar at the back of his neck. He put down the loaf and the sausages upon the dresser, and sniffed.

"Simpkin," said the tailor, "where is my twist?"

But Simpkin set down the pipkin of milk upon the dresser, and looked suspiciously at the tea-cups. He wanted his supper of little fat mouse!

"Simpkin," said the tailor, "where is my TWIST?"

But Simpkin hid a little parcel privately in the tea-pot, and spit and growled at the tailor; and if Simpkin had been able to talk, he would have asked: "Where is my MOUSE?"

"Alack, I am undone!" said the Tailor of Gloucester, and went sadly to bed.

All that night long Simpkin hunted and searched through the kitchen, peeping into cupboards and under the wainscot, and into the tea-pot where he had hidden that twist; but still he found

never a mouse!
Whenever the tailor muttered and talked in his sleep, Simpkin said "Miaw-ger-r-w-s-s-ch!" and made strange horrid noises, as cats do at night.
For the poor old tailor was very ill with a fever, tossing and turning in his four-post bed; and still in his dreams he mumbled —"No more twist! no more twist!"
All that day he was ill, and the next day, and the next; and what should become of the cherry-coloured coat? In the tailor's shop in Westgate Street the embroidered silk and satin lay cut out upon the table—one-and-twenty button-holes—and who should come to sew them, when the window was barred, and the door was fast locked?
But that does not hinder the little brown mice; they run in and out without any keys through all the old houses in Gloucester!
Out of doors the market folks went trudging through the snow to buy their geese and turkeys, and to bake their Christmas pies; but there would be no Christmas dinner for Simpkin and the poor old Tailor of Gloucester.
The tailor lay ill for three days and nights; and then it was Christmas Eve, and very late at night. The moon climbed up over the roofs and chimneys, and looked down over the gateway into College Court. There were no lights in the windows, nor any sound in the houses; all the city of Gloucester was fast asleep under the snow.
And still Simpkin wanted his mice, and he mewed as he stood beside the four-post bed.
But it is in the old story that all the beasts can talk, in the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the morning (though there are very few folk that can hear them, or know what it is that they say).
When the Cathedral clock struck twelve there was an answer—like an echo of the chimes—and Simpkin heard it, and came out of the tailor's door, and wandered about in the snow.
From all the roofs and gables and old wooden houses in Gloucester came a thousand merry voices singing the old Christmas rhymes—all the old songs that ever I heard of, and some that I don't know, like Whittington's bells.
First and loudest the cocks cried out: "Dame, get up, and bake your pies!"
"Oh, dilly, dilly, dilly!" sighed Simpkin.
And now in a garret there were lights and sounds of dancing, and cats came from over the way.
"Hey, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle! All the cats in Gloucester—except me," said Simpkin.
Under the wooden eaves the starlings and sparrows sang of Christmas pies; the jack-daws woke up in the Cathedral tower; and although it was the middle of the night the throstles and robins sang; the air was quite full of little twittering tunes.
But it was all rather provoking to poor hungry Simpkin!
Particularly he was vexed with some little shrill voices from behind a wooden lattice. I think that they were bats, because they always have very small voices—especially in a black frost, when they talk in their sleep, like the Tailor of Gloucester.
They said something mysterious that sounded like—
"Buz, quoth the blue fly, hum, quoth the bee,
Buz and hum they cry, and so do we!"
and Simpkin went away shaking his ears as if he had a bee in his bonnet.
From the tailor's shop in Westgate came a glow of light; and when Simpkin crept up to peep in at the window it was full of candles. There was a snippeting of scissors, and snappeting of thread; and little mouse voices sang loudly and gaily—
"Four-and-twenty tailors
Went to catch a snail,
The best man amongst them
Durst not touch her tail,
She put out her horns
Like a little kyloe cow,
Run, tailors, run! or she'll have you all e'en now!"
Then without a pause the little mouse voices went on again—
“Sieve my lady's oatmeal,
Grind my lady's flour,
Put it in a chestnut,
Let it stand an hour——"
"Mew! Mew!" interrupted Simpkin, and he scratched at the door.
But the key was under the tailor's pillow, he could not get in.
The little mice only laughed, and tried another tune—
"Three little mice sat down to spin,
Pussy passed by and she peeped in.
What are you at, my fine little men?
Making coats for gentlemen.
Shall I come in and cut off your threads?
Oh, no, Miss Pussy, you'd bite off our heads!"
"Mew! Mew!" cried Simpkin. "Hey diddle dinketty?" answered the little mice—
"Hey diddle dinketty, poppetty pet!
The merchants of London they wear scarlet;
Silk in the collar, and gold in the hem,
So merrily march the merchantmen!"
They clicked their thimbles to mark the time, but none of the songs pleased Simpkin; he sniffed and mewed at the door of the shop.
"And then I bought
A pipkin and a popkin,
A slipkin and a slopkin,
All for one farthing——
and upon the kitchen dresser!" added the rude little mice.
"Mew! scratch! scratch!" scuffled Simpkin on the window-sill; while the little mice inside sprang to their feet, and all began to shout at once in little twittering voices: "No more twist! No more twist!" And they barred up the window shutters and shut out Simpkin.
But still through the nicks in the shutters he could hear the click of thimbles, and little mouse voices singing—
"No more twist! No more twist!"
Simpkin came away from the shop and went home, considering in his mind. He found the poor old tailor without fever, sleeping peacefully.
Then Simpkin went on tip-toe and took a little parcel of silk out of the tea-pot, and looked at it in the moonlight; and he felt quite ashamed of his badness compared with those good little mice!
When the tailor awoke in the morning, the first thing which he saw upon the patchwork quilt, was a skein of cherry-coloured twisted silk, and beside his bed stood the repentant Simpkin!
"Alack, I am worn to a ravelling," said the Tailor of Gloucester, "but I have my twist!"
The sun was shining on the snow when the tailor got up and dressed, and came out into the street with Simpkin running before him.
The starlings whistled on the chimney stacks, and the throstles and robins sang—but they sang their own little noises, not the words they had sung in the night.
"Alack," said the tailor, "I have my twist; but no more strength—nor time—than will serve to make me one single button-hole; for this is Christmas Day in the Morning! The Mayor of Gloucester shall be married by noon—and where is his cherry-coloured coat?"
He unlocked the door of the little shop in Westgate Street, and Simpkin ran in, like a cat that expects something.
But there was no one there! Not even one little brown mouse!
The boards were swept clean; the little ends of thread and the little silk snippets were all tidied away, and gone from off the floor.
But upon the table—oh joy! the tailor gave a shout—there, where he had left plain cuttings of silk—there lay the most beautifullest coat and embroidered satin waistcoat that ever were worn by a Mayor of Gloucester.
There were roses and pansies upon the facings of the coat; and the waistcoat was worked with poppies and corn-flowers.
Everything was finished except just one single cherry-coloured button-hole, and where that button-hole was wanting there was

pinned a scrap of paper with these words—in little teeny weeny writing—
NO MORE TWIST
And from then began the luck of the Tailor of Gloucester; he grew quite stout, and he grew quite rich.
He made the most wonderful waistcoats for all the rich merchants of Gloucester, and for all the fine gentlemen of the country round.
Never were seen such ruffles, or such embroidered cuffs and lappets! But his button-holes were the greatest triumph of it all.
The stitches of those button-holes were so neat—so neat—I wonder how they could be stitched by an old man in spectacles, with crooked old fingers, and a tailor's thimble.
The stitches of those button-holes were so small—so small—they looked as if they had been made by little mice!

Featured Art: Christmastide

P.26 Decorating the Christmas Tree'
by Marcel Rieder

P.27 'Christmas Morning'
Joseph Clarke
'The Shortening Winter's Day'
David Farquarson

P.28 'Christmas Night (The Blessing of the Oxen)'
Paul Gauguin
'The Christmas Tree'
Albert Chevallier Tayler

P.29 'A Christmas Carol
Dante Gabriel Rossetti'

Christmas Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan

Clement A Miles

YORKSHIRE SWORD-ACTORS: ST. GEORGE IN COMBAT WITH ST. PETER.
From an article by Mr. T. M. Fallow in The Antiquary, May, 1895.

CHRISTMAS POETRY

In Wales, in the early nineteenth century, carol-singing was more popular, perhaps, than in England; the carols were sung to the harp, in church at the Plygain or early morning service on Christmas Day, in the homes of the people, and at the doors of the houses by visitors. In Ireland, too, the custom of carol-singing then prevailed. Dr. Douglas Hyde, in his "Religious Songs of Connacht," gives and translates an interesting Christmas hymn in Irish, from which two verses may be quoted. They set forth the great paradox of the Incarnation: —

"Little babe who art so great,Child so young who art so old, In the manger small his room,Whom not heaven itself could hold. Father —not more old than thou?Mother —younger, can it be? Older, younger is the Son,Younger, older, she than he."

Even in dour Scotland, with its hatred of religious festivals, some kind of carolling survived here and there among Highland folk, and a remarkable and very "Celtic" Christmas song has been translated from the Gaelic by Mr. J. A. Campbell. It begins: —

"Sing hey the Gift, sing ho the Gift,Sing hey the Gift of the Living,Son of the Dawn, Son of the Star,Son of the Planet, Son of the Far [twice],Sing hey the Gift, sing ho the Gift."

The great carol period is, as has already been said, the fifteenth, and the first half of the sixteenth, century; after the Reformation the English domestic Christmas largely loses its religious colouring, and the best carols of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are songs of feasting and pagan ceremonies rather than of the Holy Child and His Mother. There is no lack of fine Christmas verse in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, but for the most part it belongs to the oratory and the chamber rather than the hall. The Nativity has become a subject for private contemplation, for individual devotion, instead of, as in the later Middle Ages, a matter for common jubilation, a wonder-story that really happened, in which, all alike and all together, the serious and the frivolous could rejoice, something that, with all its marvel, could be taken as a matter of course, like the return of the seasons or the rising of the sun on the just and on the unjust.

English Christmas poetry after the mid-sixteenth century is, then, individual rather than communal in its spirit; it is also a thing less of the people, more of the refined and cultivated few. The Puritanism which so deeply affected English religion was abstract rather than dramatic in its conception of Christianity, it was concerned less with the events of the Saviour's life than with Redemption as a transaction between God and man; St. Paul and the Old Testament rather than the gospels were its inspiration. Moreover, the material was viewed not as penetrated by and revealing the spiritual, but as sheer impediment blocking out the vision of spiritual things. Hence the extremer Puritans were completely out of touch with the sensuous poetry of Christmas, a festival which, as we shall see, they actually suppressed when they came into power.

The singing of sacred carols by country people continued, indeed, but the creative artistic impulse was lost. True carols after the Reformation tend to be doggerel, and no doubt many of the traditional pieces printed in such collections as Bramley and Stainer's are debased survivals from the Middle Ages, or perhaps new words written for old tunes. Such carols as "God rest you merry, gentlemen," have unspeakably delightful airs, and the words charm us moderns by their quaintness and rusticity, but they are far from the exquisite loveliness of the mediaeval things. Gleams of great beauty are, however, sometimes found amid matter that in the process of transmission has almost ceased to be poetry. Here, for instance, are five stanzas from the traditional "Cherry-tree Carol":—

"As Joseph was a-walking,
He heard an angel sing:
'This night shall be born
Our heavenly King.
'He neither shall be born
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in the place of Paradise,
But in an ox's stall.
'He neither shall be clothed
In purple nor in pall,
But all in fair linen
As wear babies all.
'He neither shall be rocked
In silver nor in gold,
But in a wooden cradle
That rocks on the mould.
'He neither shall be christened
In white wine nor red,
But with fair spring water
With which we were christened.'"

The old carols sung by country folk have often not much to do with the Nativity; they are sometimes rhymed lives of Christ or legends of the Holy Childhood. Of the latter class the strangest is "The Bitter Withy," discovered in Herefordshire by Mr. Frank Sidgwick. It tells how the little Jesus asked three lads to play with Him at ball. But they refused: —

"'O we are lords' and ladies' sons,
Born in bower or in hall;
And you are but a poor maid's child,
Born in an oxen's stall.
'If I am but a poor maid's child,
Born in an oxen's stall,
I will let you know at the very latter end
That I am above you all.'
So he built him a bridge with the beams of the sun,
And over the sea went he,
And after followed the three jolly jerdins,
And drowned they were all three.
Then Mary mild called home her child,
And laid him across her knee,
And with a handful of green withy twigs
She gave him slashes three.
'O the withy, O the withy, O bitter withy
That causes me to smart!
O the withy shall be the very first tree
That perishes at the heart.'"

From these popular ballads, mediaeval memories in the rustic mind, we must return to the devotional verse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Two of the greatest poets of the Nativity, the Roman priests Southwell and Crashaw, are deeply affected by the wave of mysticism which passed over Europe in their time. Familiar as is Southwell's "The Burning Babe," few will be sorry to find it here: —

"As I in hoary winter's night
Stood shivering in the snow,
Surprised I was with sudden heat,
Which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye
To view what fire was near,
A pretty Babe all burning bright
Did in the air appear;
Who, scorchèd with excessive heat,
Such floods of tears did shed,
As though His floods should quench His flames
Which with His tears were fed.
'Alas!' quoth He, 'but newly born,
In fiery heats I fry,Yet none approach to warm their hearts
Or feel my fire, but I!
My faultless breast the furnace is,
The fuel, wounding thorns;
Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke,
The ashes, shame and scorns;
The fuel Justice layeth on,
And Mercy blows the coals,
The metal in this furnace wrought
Are men's defilèd souls,
For which, as now on fire I am,
To work them to their good,

So will I melt into a bath,
To wash them in my blood.'
With this he vanished out of sight,
And swiftly shrunk away:
And straight I callèd unto mind
That it was Christmas Day."
As for Crashaw,
"That the great angel-blinding light should shrink
His blaze to shine in a poor shepherd's eye,
That the unmeasured God so low should sink
As Pris'ner in a few poor rags to lie,
That from His mother's breast
He milk should drink
Who feeds with nectar heaven's fair family,
That a vile manger
His low bed should prove
Who in a throne of stars thunders above:
That He, whom the sun serves, should faintly peep
Through clouds of infant flesh; that He the old
Eternal Word should be a Child and weep,
That He who made the fire should fear the cold:
That heaven's high majesty
His court should keep
In a clay cottage, by each blast controll'd:
That glory's self should serve our griefs and fears,
And free Eternity submit to years —"
such are the wondrous paradoxes celebrated in his glowing imagery. The contrast of the winter snow with the burning heat of Incarnate Love, of the blinding light of Divinity with the night's darkness, indeed the whole paradox of the Incarnation — Infinity in extremest limitation —is nowhere realized with such intensity as by him. Yet, magnificent as are his best lines, his verse sometimes becomes too like the seventeenth-century Jesuit churches, with walls overladen with decoration, with great languorous pictures and air heavy with incense; and then we long for the dewy freshness of the early carols.
The representative Anglican poets of the seventeenth century, Herbert and Vaughan, scarcely rise to their greatest heights in their treatment of Christmas, but with them as with the Romanists it is the mystical note that is dominant. Herbert sings: —
"O Thou, whose glorious, yet contracted, light,
Wrapt in night's mantle, stole into a manger;
Since my dark soul and brutish is Thy right,
To man, of all beasts, be not Thou a stranger.
Furnish and deck my soul, that thou may'st have
A better lodging than a rack or grave."
And Vaughan: —
"I would I had in my best part
Fit rooms for Thee! or that my heart
Were so clean asThy manger was!
But I am all filth, and obscene:
Yet, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make clean.
Sweet Jesu! will then. Let no more
This leper haunt and soil thy door!
Cure him, ease him,
O release him!
And let once more, by mystic birth,
The Lord of life be born in earth."
In Herrick —how different a country parson from Herbert! —we find a sort of pagan piety towards the Divine Infant which, though purely English in its expression, makes us think of some French Noëliste or some present-day Italian worshipper of the Bambino: —
"Instead of neat enclosures
Of interwoven osiers,
Instead of fragrant posies
Of daffodils and roses,
Thy cradle, kingly Stranger,
As gospel tells,Was nothing else
But here a homely manger.
But we with silks not crewels,
With sundry precious jewels,
And lily work will dress Thee;
And, as we dispossess Thee
Of clouts, we'll make a chamber,
Sweet Babe, for Thee,Of ivory,
And plaster'd round with amber."
Poems such as Herrick's to the Babe of Bethlehem reveal in their writers a certain childlikeness, an insouciance without irreverence, the spirit indeed of a child which turns to its God quite simply and naturally, which makes Him after its own child-image, and sees Him as a friend who can be pleased with trifles — almost, in fact, as a glorious playmate. Such a nature has no intense feeling of sin, but can ask for forgiveness and then forget; religion for it is rather an outward ritual to be duly and gracefully performed than an inward transforming power. Herrick is a strange exception among the Anglican singers of Christmas.
Milton's great Nativity hymn, with its wondrous blending of pastoral simplicity and classical conceits, is too familiar for quotation here; it may be suggested, however, that this work of the poet's youth is far more Anglican than Puritan in its spirit.
Sweet and solemn Spenserian echoes are these verses from Giles Fletcher's "Christ's Victory in Heaven": —
"Who can forget —never to be forgot —
The time, that all the world in slumber lies,
When, like the stars, the singing angels shot
To earth, and heaven awakèd all his eyes
To see another sun at midnight rise
On earth? Was never sight of pareil fame,
For God before man like Himself did frame,
But God Himself now like a mortal man became.
A Child He was, and had not learnt to speak,
That with His word the world before did make;
His mother's arms Him bore, He was so weak,
That with one hand the vaults of heaven could shake,
See how small room my infant Lord doth take,
Whom all the world is not enough to hold!
Who of His years, or of His age hath told?
Never such age so young, never a child so old."
The old lullaby tradition is continued by Wither, though the infant in the cradle is an ordinary human child, who is rocked to sleep with the story of his Lord: —
"A little Infant once was He,
And strength in weakness then was laid
Upon His virgin-mother's knee,
That power to thee might be conveyed.
Sweet baby, then, forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.
* * * * *
Within a manger lodged thy Lord,
Where oxen lay and asses fed;
Warm rooms we do to thee afford,
An easy cradle or a bed.
Sweet baby, then, forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep."
When we come to the eighteenth century we find, where we might least expect it, among the moral verses of Dr. Watts, a charming cradle-song conceived in just the same way: —
"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed!
Heavenly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.
* * * * *
Soft and easy is thy cradle;
Coarse and hard thy Saviour lay.
When His birthplace was a stable,
And His softest bed was hay.
* * * * *
Lo He slumbers in His manger
Where the hornèd oxen fed; —
Peace, my darling, here's no danger;

Here's no ox a-near thy bed."
It is to the eighteenth century that the three most popular of English Christmas hymns belong. Nahum Tate's "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" —one of the very few hymns (apart from metrical psalms) in common use in the Anglican Church before the nineteenth century —is a bald and apparently artless paraphrase of St. Luke which, by some accident, has attained dignity, and is aided greatly by the simple and noble tune now attached to it. Charles Wesley's "Hark, the herald angels sing," or —as it should be —"Hark, how all the welkin rings," is much admired by some, but to the present writer seems a mere piece of theological rhetoric. Byrom's "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn," has the stiffness and formality or its period, but it is not without a certain quaintness and dignity. One could hardly expect fine Christmas poetry of an age whose religion was on the one hand staid, rational, unimaginative, and on the other "Evangelical" in the narrow sense, finding its centre in the Atonement rather than the Incarnation.
The revived mediaevalism, religious and aesthetic, of the nineteenth century, produced a number of Christmas carols. Some, like Swinburne's "Three damsels in the queen's chamber," with 85its exquisite verbal music and delightful colour, and William Morris's less successful "Masters, in this hall," and "Outlanders, whence come ye last?" are the work of unbelievers and bear witness only to the aesthetic charm of the Christmas story; but there are others, mostly from Roman or Anglo-Catholic sources, of real religious inspiration. The most spontaneous are Christina Rossetti's, whose haunting rhythms and delicate feeling are shown at their best in her songs of the Christ Child. More studied and self-conscious are the austere Christmas verses of Lionel Johnson and the graceful carols of Professor Selwyn Image. In one poem Mr. Image strikes a deeper and stronger note than elsewhere; its solemn music takes us back to an earlier century: —

"Consider, O my soul, what morn is this!
Whereon the eternal Lord of all things made,
For us, poor mortals, and our endless bliss,
Came down from heaven; and, in a manger laid,
The first, rich, offerings of our ransom paid:
Consider, O my soul, what morn is this!"

Not a few contemporary poets have given us Christmas carols or poems. Among the freshest and most natural are those of Katharine Tynan, while Mr. Gilbert Chesterton has written some Christmas lyrics full of colour and vitality, and with a true mystical quality. Singing of Christmas, Mr. Chesterton is at his best; he has instinctive sympathy with the spirit of the festival, its human kindliness, its democracy, its sacramentalism, its exaltation of the child: —

"The thatch of the roof was as golden
Though dusty the straw was and old;
The wind had a peal as of trumpets,
Though blowing and barren and cold.
The mother's hair was a glory,
Though loosened and torn;
For under the eaves in the gloaming
A child was born."

Thus opens a fine poem on the Nativity as symbolizing miracle of birth, of childhood with its infinite possibilities, eternal renewal of faith and hope.

MASKING, THE MUMMERS' PLAY, THE FEAST OF FOOLS, AND THE BOY BISHOP

We have already seen a good deal of masking in connection with St. Nicholas, Knecht Ruprecht, and other figures of the German Christmas; we may next give some attention to English customs of the same sort during the Twelve Days, and then pass on to the strange burlesque ceremonies of the Feast of Fools and the Boy Bishop, ceremonies which show an intrusion of pagan mummery into the sanctuary itself.

Christmas Masking.

The custom of Christmas masking, "mumming," or "disguising" can be traced at the English court as early as the reign of Edward III. It is in all probability connected with that wearing of beasts' heads and skins of which we have already noted various examples —its origin in folk-custom seems to have been the coming of a band of worshippers clad in this uncouth but auspicious garb to bring good luck to a house. The most direct English survival is found in the village mummers who still call themselves "guisers" or "geese-dancers" and claim the right to enter every house. These will be dealt with shortly, after a consideration of more courtly customs of the same kind.
298In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the English court masque reached its greatest developments; the fundamental idea was then generally overlaid with splendid trappings, the dresses and the arrangements were often extremely elaborate, and the introduction of dialogued speech made these "disguises" regular dramatic performances. A notable example is Ben Jonson's "Masque of Christmas." Shakespeare, however, gives us in "Henry VIII." an example of a simpler impromptu form: the king and a party dressed up as shepherds break in upon a banquet of Wolsey's.
In this volume we are more concerned with the popular Christmas than with the festivities of kings and courts and grandees. Mention must, however, be made of a personage who played an important part in the Christmas of the Tudor court and appeared also in colleges, Inns of Court, and the houses of the nobility —the "Lord of Misrule." He was annually elected to preside over the revels, had a retinue of courtiers, and was surrounded by elaborate ceremonial. He seems to be the equivalent and was probably the direct descendant of the "Abbot" or "Bishop" of the Feast of Fools, who will be noticed later in this chapter. Sometimes indeed he is actually called "Abbot of Misrule." A parallel to him is the Twelfth Night "king," and he appears to be a courtly example of the temporary monarch of folk-custom, though his name is sometimes extended to "kings" of quite vulgar origin elected not by court or gentry but by the common people. The "Lord of Misrule" was among the relics of paganism most violently attacked by Puritan writers like Stubbes and Prynne, and the Great Rebellion seems to have been the death of him.

Mummers' Plays and Morris Dances.

Let us turn now to the rustic Christmas mummers, to-day fast disappearing, but common enough in the mid-nineteenth century. Their goings-on are really far more interesting, because more traditional, than the elaborate shows and dressings-up of the court. Their names vary: "mummers" and "guisers" are the commonest; in Sussex they are "tipteerers," perhaps because of 299the perquisites they collect, in Cornwall "geese-dancers" ("geese" no doubt comes from "disguise"), in Shropshire "morris" —or "merry" —"dancers." It is to be noted that they are unbidden guests, and enter your house as of right. Sometimes they merely dance, sing, and feast, but commonly they perform a rude drama. The plays acted by the mummers vary so much that it is difficult to describe them in general terms. There is no reason to suppose that the words are of great antiquity —the earliest form may perhaps date from the seventeenth century; they appear to be the result of a crude dramatic and literary instinct working upon the remains of traditional ritual, and manipulating it for purposes of entertainment. The central figure is St. George (occasionally he is called Sir, King, or Prince George), and the main dramatic substance, after a prologue and introduction of the characters, is a fight and the arrival of a doctor to bring back the slain to life. At the close comes a quête for money. The name George is found in all the Christmas plays, but the other characters have a bewildering variety of names ranging from Hector and Alexander to Bonaparte and Nelson.
Mr. Chambers in two very interesting and elaborately documented chapters has traced a connection between these St. George players and the sword-dancers found at Christmas or other festivals in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, and Great Britain. The sword-dance in its simplest form is described by Tacitus in his "Germania": "they have," he says of the Germans,

"but one kind of public show: in every gathering it is the same. Naked youths, who profess this sport, fling themselves in dance among swords and levelled lances." In certain forms of the dance there are figures in which the swords are brought together on the heads of performers, or a pretence is made to cut at heads and feet, or the swords are put in a ring round a person's neck. This strongly suggests that an execution, probably a sacrifice, lies at the bottom of the dances. In several cases, moreover, they are accompanied by sets of verses containing the incident of a quarrel and the violent death of one of the performers. The likeness to the central feature of the St. George play —the slaying —will be noticed. In one of the dances, too, there is even a doctor who revives the victim.

In England the sword-dance is found chiefly in the north, but with it appear to be identical the morris-dances —characterized by the wearing of jingling bells —which are commoner in the southern counties. Blackened faces are common in both, and both have the same grotesque figures, a man and a woman, often called Tommy and Bessy in the sword-dance and "the fool" and Maid Marian in the morris. Moreover the morris-dancers in England sometimes use swords, and in one case the performers of an undoubted sword-dance were called "morrice" dancers in the eighteenth century. Bells too, so characteristic of the morris, are mentioned in some Continental accounts of the sword-dance.

Intermediate between these dances and the fully developed St. George dramas are the plays performed on Plough Monday in Lincolnshire and the East Midlands. They all contain a good deal of dancing, a violent death and a revival, and grotesques found both in the dances and in the Christmas plays.

The sword-dance thus passes by a gradual transition, the dancing diminishing, the dramatic elements increasing, into the mummers' plays of St. George. The central motive, death and revival, Mr. Chambers regards as a symbol of the resurrection of the year or the spirit of vegetation, like the Thuringian custom of executing a "wild man" covered with leaves, whom a doctor brings to life again by bleeding. This piece of ritual has apparently been attracted to Christmas from an early feast of spring, and Plough Monday, when the East Midland plays take place, is just such an early spring feast. Again, in some places the 301St. George play is performed at Easter, a date alluded to in the title, "Pace-eggers'" or "Pasque-eggers'" play.

Two grotesque figures appear with varying degrees of clearness and with various names in the dances and in the plays —the "fool" (Tommy) who wears the skin and tail of a fox or other animal, and a man dressed in woman's clothes (Bessy). In these we may recognize the skin-clad mummer and the man aping a woman whom we meet in the old Kalends denunciations. Sometimes the two are combined, while a hobby-horse also not unfrequently appears.

How exactly St. George came to be the central figure of the Christmas plays is uncertain; possibly they may be a development of a dance in which appeared the "Seven Champions," the English national heroes —of whom Richard Johnson wrote a history in 1596 —with St. George at their head. It is more probable, however, that the saint came in from the mediaeval pageants held on his day in many English towns.

Can it be that the German St. Nicholas plays are more Christianized and sophisticated forms of folk-dramas like in origin to those we have been discussing? They certainly resemble the English plays in the manner in which one actor calls in another by name; while the grotesque figures introduced have some likeness to the "fool" of the morris.

Christmas mumming, it may be added, is found in eastern as well as western Europe. In Greece, where ecclesiastical condemnations of such things can be traced with remarkable clearness from early times to the twelfth century, it takes sundry forms. "At Pharsala," writes Mr. J. C. Lawson, "there is a sort of play at the Epiphany, in which the mummers represent bride, bridegroom, and 'Arab'; the Arab tries to carry off the bride, and the bridegroom defends her.... Formerly also at 'Kozane and in many other parts of Greece,' according to a Greek writer in the early part of the nineteenth century, throughout the Twelve Days boys carrying bells used to go round the houses, singing songs and having 'one or more of their company dressed up with masks and bells and foxes' brushes and other such things to give them a weird and monstrous look.'

In Russia, too, mummers used to go about at Christmastide, visiting houses, dancing, and performing all kinds of antics. "Prominent parts were always played by human representatives of a goat and a bear. Some of the party would be disguised as 'Lazaruses,' that is, as blind beggars." A certain number of the mummers were generally supposed to play the part of thieves anxious to break in. Readers of Tolstoy's "War and Peace" may remember a description of some such maskings in the year 1810.

The Feast of Fools.

So far, in this Second Part, we have been considering customs practised chiefly in houses, streets, and fields. We must now turn to certain festivities following hard upon Christmas Day, which, though pagan in origin and sometimes even blasphemous, found their way in the Middle Ages within the walls of the church.

Shortly after Christmas a group of tripudia or revels was held by the various inferior clergy and ministrants of cathedrals and other churches. These festivals, of which the best known are the Feast of Fools and the Boy Bishop ceremonies, have been so fully described by other writers, and my space here is so limited, that I need but treat them in outline, and for detail refer the reader to such admirable accounts as are to be found in Chapters XIII., XIV., and XV. of Mr. Chamber's "The Mediaeval Stage."

Johannes Belethus, Rector of Theology at Paris towards the end of the twelfth century, speaks of four tripudia held after Christmas: —those of the deacons on St. Stephen's Day, the priests on St. John's, the choir-boys on Holy Innocents', and the subdeacons on the Circumcision, the Epiphany, or the Octave of the Epiphany. The feast of subdeacons, says Belethus, "we call that of fools." It is this feast which, though not apparently the earliest in origin of the four, was the most riotous and disorderly, and shows most clearly its pagan character. Belethus' mention of it is the first clear notice, though disorderly revels of the same kind seem to have existed at Constantinople as early as the ninth century. At first confined to the subdeacons, the Feast of Fools became in its later developments a festival not only of that order but of the 303inferior clergy in general, of the vicars choral, the chaplains, and the choir-clerks, as distinguished from the canons. For this rabble of poor and low-class clergy it was no doubt a welcome relaxation, and one can hardly wonder that they let themselves go in burlesquing the sacred but often wearisome rites at which it was their business to be present through many long hours, or that they delighted to usurp for once in a way the functions ordinarily performed by their superiors. The putting down of the mighty from their seat and the exalting of them of low degree was the keynote of the festival. While "Deposuit potentes de sede: et exaltavit humiles" was being sung at the "Magnificat," it would appear that the precentor's baculus or staff was handed over to the clerk who was to be "lord of the feast" for the year, and throughout the services of the day the inferior clergy predominated, under the leadership of this chosen "lord." He was usually given some title of ecclesiastical dignity, "bishop," "prelate," "archbishop," "cardinal," or even "pope," was vested in full pontificals, and in some cases sat on the real bishop's throne, gave benedictions, and issued indulgences.

These lower clergy, it must be remembered, belonged to the peasant or small bourgeois class and were probably for the most part but ill-educated. They were likely to bring with them into the Church the superstitions floating about among the people, and the Feast of Fools may be regarded as a recoil of paganism upon Christianity in its very sanctuary. "An ebullition of the natural lout beneath the cassock" it has been called by Mr. Chambers, and many of its usages may be explained by the reaction of coarse natures freed for once from restraint. It brought to light, however, not merely personal vulgarity, but a whole range of traditional customs, derived probably from a fusion of the Roman feast of the Kalends of January with Teutonic or Celtic heathen festivities.

A general account of its usages is given in a letter addressed in 1445 by the Paris Faculty of Theology to the bishops and chapters of France: —

"Priests and clerks may be seen wearing masks and monstrous visages at the hours of office. They dance in the choir dressed as 304women, panders or minstrels. They sing wanton songs. They eat black puddings at the horn of the altar while the celebrant is saying Mass. They play at dice there. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap through the church, without a blush at their own shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theatres in shabby traps and carts, and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gesture and verses scurrilous and unchaste."

The letter also speaks of "bishops" or "archbishops" of Fools, who wore mitres and held pastoral staffs. We here see clearly, besides mere irreverence, an outcrop of pagan practices. Topsy-turvydom, the temporary exaltation of inferiors, was itself a characteristic of the Kalends celebrations, and a still more remarkable feature of them was, as we have seen, the wearing of beast-masks and the dressing up of men in women's clothes. And what is the "bishop" or "archbishop" but a parallel to, and, we may well believe, an example of, the mock king whom Dr. Frazer has traced in so many a folk-festival, and who is found at the Saturnalia?

One more feature of the Feast of Fools must be considered, the Ass who gave to it the not uncommon title of asinaria festa. At Bourges, Sens, and Beauvais, a curious half-comic hymn was sung in church, the so-called "Prose of the Ass." It begins as follows: —

"Orientis partibus
Adventavit Asinus,
Pulcher et fortissimus,
Sarcinis aptissimus.
Hez, Sir Asnes, car chantez,
Belle bouche rechignez,
Vous aurez du foin assez
Et de l'avoine a plantez."

And after eight verses in praise of the beast, with some mention of his connection with Bethlehem and the Wise Men, it closes thus: —

"Amen dicas, Asine,
Iam satur de gramine,
Amen, Amen, itera,
Aspernare vetera.
Hez va, hez va! hez va, hez!
Bialx Sire Asnes, car allez:
Belle bouche, car chantez."

An ass, it would seem, was actually brought into church, at Beauvais at all events, during the singing of this song on the feast of the Circumcision. On January 14 an extraordinary ceremony took place there. A girl with a child in her arms rode upon an ass into St. Stephen's church, to represent the Flight into Egypt. The Introit, "Kyrie," "Gloria," and "Credo" at Mass ended in a bray, and at the close of the service the priest instead of saying "Ite, missa est," had to bray three times, and the people to respond in like manner. Mr. Chambers's theory is that the ass was a descendant of the cervulus or hobby-buck who figures so largely in ecclesiastical condemnations of Kalends customs.

The country par excellence of the Feast of the Fools was France. It can also be traced in Germany and Bohemia, while in England too there are notices of it, though far fewer than in France. Its abuses were the subject of frequent denunciations by Church reformers from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The feast was prohibited at various times, and notably by the Council of Basle in 1435, but it was too popular to be quickly suppressed, and it took a century and a half to die out after this condemnation by a general council of the Church. In one cathedral, Amiens, it even lingered until 1721.

When in the fifteenth century and later the Feast of Fools was expelled from the churches of France, associations of laymen sprang up to carry on its traditions outside. It was indeed a form of entertainment which the townsfolk as well as the lower clergy thoroughly appreciated, and they were by no means willing to let it die. A Prince des Sots took the place of the "bishop," and was chosen by sociétés joyeuses organized by the youth of the cities for New Year merrymaking. Gradually their activities grew, and their celebrations came to take place at other festive times beside the Christmas season. The sots had a distinctive dress, its 306most characteristic feature being a hood with asses' ears, probably a relic of the primitive days when the heads of sacrificed animals were worn by festal worshippers.

The Boy Bishop.

Of older standing than the Feast of Fools were the Christmas revels of the deacons, the priests, and the choir-boys. They can be traced back to the early tenth century, and may have originated at the great song-school of St. Gall near Constance. The most important of the three feasts was that of the boys on Holy Innocents' Day, a theoretically appropriate date. Corresponding to the "lord" of the Feast of Fools was the famous "Boy Bishop," a choir-boy chosen by the lads themselves, who was vested in cope and mitre, held a pastoral staff, and gave the benediction. Other boys too usurped the dignities of their elders, and were attired as dean, archdeacons, and canons. Offices for the festival, in which the Boy Bishop figures largely, are to be found in English, French, and German service-books, the best known in this country being those in the Sarum Processional and Breviary. In England these ceremonies were far more popular and lasting than the Feast of Fools, and, unlike it, they were recognized and approved by authority, probably because boys were more amenable to discipline than men, and objectionable features could be pruned away with comparative ease. The festivities must have formed a delightful break in the year of the mediaeval schoolboy, for whom holidays, as distinguished from holy-days for church-going, scarcely existed. The feast, as we shall see, was by no means confined within the church walls; there was plenty of merrymaking and money-making outside.

Minute details have been preserved of the Boy Bishop customs at St. Paul's Cathedral in the thirteenth century. It had apparently been usual for the "bishop" to make the cathedral dignitaries act as taper- and incense-bearers, thus reversing matters so that the great performed the functions of the lowly. In 1263 this was forbidden, and only clerks of lower rank might be chosen for these offices. But the "bishop" had the right to demand after Compline on the Eve of the Innocents a supper for himself and his train from the Dean or one of his canons. The number of his following must, however, be limited; if he went to the Dean's he might take with him a train of fifteen: two chaplains, two taper-bearers, five clerks, two vergers, and four residentiary canons; if to a lesser dignitary his attendants were to be fewer.

On Innocents' Day he was given a dinner, after which came a cavalcade through the city, that the "bishop" might bless the people. He had also to preach a sermon —no doubt written for him.

Examples of such discourses are still extant, and are not without quaint touches. For instance the bidding prayer before one of them alludes to "the ryghte reverende fader and worshypfull lorde my broder Bysshopp of London, your dyoceasan," and "my worshypfull broder [the] Deane of this cathedrall chirche," while in another the preacher remarks, speaking of the choristers and children of the song-school, "Yt is not so long sens I was one of them myself."

In some places it appears, though this is by no means certain, that the boy actually sang Mass. The "bishop's" office was a very desirable one not merely because of the feasting, but because he had usually the right to levy contributions on the faithful, and the amounts collected were often very large. At York, for instance, in 1396 the "bishop" pocketed about £77, all expenses paid.

The general parallelism of the Boy Bishop customs and the Feast of Fools is obvious, and no doubt they had much the same folk-origin. One point, already mentioned, should specially be

noticed: the election of the Boy Bishop generally took place on December 5, the Eve of St. Nicholas, patron of children; he was often called “Nicholas bishop”; and sometimes, as at Eton and Mayence, he exercised episcopal functions at divine service on the eve and the feast itself. It is possible, as Mr. Chambers suggests, that St. Nicholas's Day was an older date for the boys’ festival than Holy Innocents’, and that from the connection with St. Nicholas, the bishop saint par excellence (he was said to have been consecrated by divine command when still a mere layman), sprang the custom of giving the title “bishop” to the “lord” first of the boys’ feast and later of the Feast of Fools.

In the late Middle Ages the Boy Bishop was found not merely in cathedral, monastic, and collegiate churches but in many parish churches throughout England and Scotland. Various inventories of the vestments and ornaments provided for him still exist. With the beginnings of the Reformation came his suppression: a proclamation of Henry VIII., dated July 22, 1541, commands “that from henceforth all suche superstitions be loste and clyerlye extinguisshed throughowte all this his realmes and dominions, forasmoche as the same doo resemble rather the unlawfull superstition of gentilitie [paganism], than the pure and sincere religion of Christe.” In Mary's reign the Boy Bishop reappeared, along with other “Popish” usages, but after Elizabeth's accession he naturally fell into oblivion. A few traces of him lingered in the seventeenth century. “The Schoole-boies in the west,” says Aubrey, “still religiously observe St. Nicholas day (Decemb. 6th), he was the Patron of the Schoole-boies. At Curry-Yeovill in Somersetshire, where there is a Howschole (or schole) in the Church, they have annually at that time a Barrell of good Ale brought into the church; and that night they have the priviledge to breake open their Masters Cellar-dore.”

In France he seems to have gradually vanished, as, after the Reformation, the Catholic Church grew more and more “respectable,” but traces of him are to be found in the eighteenth century at Lyons and Rheims; and at Sens, even in the nineteenth, the choir-boys used to play at being bishops on Innocents’ Day and call their “archbishop” âne —a memory this of the old asinaria festa. In Denmark a vague trace of him was retained in the nineteenth century in a children's game. A boy was dressed up in a white shirt, and seated on a chair, and the children sang a verse beginning, “Here we consecrate a Yule-bishop,” and offered him nuts and apples.

Gawain and the Green Knight

Translated by Jessie L Weston (1898).
Foreword by Nathan Hood.

Évrard d'Espinques, Prose Lancelot, 1470.

Of the telling of tales concerning King Arthur there are many, but the finest one in the (Middle) English language was Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Written by a contemporary of Chaucer's probably living in the West Midlands (as indicated by his geographical references), it is a Medieval Romance of the highest order. An arresting narrative, it revolves around a dramatic challenge and a test of character. The story is conveyed in luscious verse, rich with earthy and vibrant description. The anonymous 14th century author was a man who loved life in all its vagaries, which one detects from the relish with which he describes the joys of the feast, the change of the seasons and the drama at Camelot.

For great consternation does Arthur's court face during their Christmas carousing. Celebrating the coming of Christ over the twelve days of Christmas with banquets of the finest splendour, the guests enjoying tender meats and pleasant melodies, they are rudely interrupted by a monstrous knight who is entirely emerald in colour. A huge man of muscle riding a ginormous steed rode into the hall, declares a challenge: is any man brave enough to strike a blow on me and let me return said blow? Initially stunned into silence, Sir Gawain, Arthur's noblest knight, takes up the Christmas jest, in part to save his uncle from the embarrassment of cowardice. What ensues is a test which will push Gawain's moral integrity to its limits.

In Fitts I and II, that are translated into prose here by the influential Arthurian scholar Jessie L Weston, the Green Knight's challenge and Gawain's subsequent journey to fulfil his vow. Its setting is the feasts, games and celebrations of Christmas in medieval England. An Arthurian Yuletide legend, it joins the playful and the deadly serious in a magnificent work of poety. Parts III and IV will feature in subsequent editions of the Corncrake.

Fitt I Of the Making of Britain

After the siege and the assault of Troy, when that burg was destroyed and burnt to ashes, and the traitor slain for his treason, the noble Æneas and his kin sailed forth to become princes and patrons of well-nigh all the Western Isles. Thus Romulus built Rome (and gave to the city his own name, which it bears even to this day); and Ticius turned him to Tuscany; and Langobard raised him up dwellings in Lombardy; and Felix Brutus sailed far over the French flood, and founded the kingdom of Britain, wherein have been war and waste and wonder, and bliss and bale, oft-times since.

And in that kingdom of Britain have been wrought more gallant deeds than in any other; but of all British kings Arthur was the most valiant, as I have heard tell, therefore will I set forth a wondrous adventure that fell out in his time. And if ye will listen to me, but for a little while, I will tell it even as it stands in story stiff and strong, fixed in the letter, as it hath long been known in the land.

How Arthur held high feast at Camelot

King Arthur lay at Camelot upon a Christmas-tide, with many a gallant lord and lovely lady, and all the noble brotherhood of the Round Table. There they held rich revels with gay talk and jest; one while they would ride forth to joust and tourney, and again back to the court to make carols; for there was the feast holden fifteen days with all the mirth that men could devise, song and glee, glorious to hear, in the daytime, and dancing at night. Halls and chambers were crowded with noble guests, the bravest of knights and the loveliest of ladies, and Arthur himself was the comeliest king that ever held a court. For all this fair folk were in their youth, the fairest and most fortunate under heaven, and the king himself of such fame that it were hard now to name so valiant a hero.

New Year's Day

Now the New Year had but newly come in, and on that day a double portion was served on the high table to all the noble guests, and thither came the king with all his knights, when the service in the chapel had been sung to an end. And they greeted each other for the New Year, and gave rich gifts, the one to the other (and they that received them were not wroth, that may ye well believe!), and the maidens laughed and made mirth till it was time to get them to meat. Then they washed and sat them down to the feast in fitting rank and order, and Guinevere the queen, gaily clad, sat on the high daïs. Silken was her seat, with a fair canopy over her head, of rich tapestries of Tars, embroidered, and studded with costly gems; fair she was to look upon, with her shining grey eyes, a fairer woman might no man boast himself of having seen.

But Arthur would not eat till all were served, so full of joy and gladness was he, even as a child; he liked not either to lie long, or to sit long at meat, so worked upon him his young blood and his wild brain. And another custom he had also, that came of his nobility, that he would never eat upon an high day till he had been advised of some knightly deed, or some strange and marvellous tale, of his ancestors, or of arms, or of other ventures. Or till some knight should seek of him leave to joust with another, that they might set their lives in jeopardy, one against another, as fortune might favour them. Such was the king's custom when he sat in hall at each high feast with his noble knights, therefore on that New Year tide, he abode, fair of face, on the throne, and made much mirth withal.

Of the noble knights there present

Thus the king sat before the high table, and spake of many things; and there good Sir Gawain was seated by Guinevere the queen, and on her other side sat Agravain, à la dure main; both were the king's sister's sons and full gallant knights. And at the end of the table was Bishop Bawdewyn, and Ywain, King Urien's son, sat at the other side alone. These were worthily served on the daïs, and at the lower tables sat many valiant knights. Then they bare the first course with the blast of trumpets and waving of banners, with the sound of drums and pipes, of song and lute, that many a heart was uplifted at the melody. Many were the dainties, and rare the meats, so great was the plenty they might scarce find room on the board to set on the dishes. Each helped himself as he liked best, and to each two were twelve dishes, with great plenty of beer and wine.

The coming of the Green Knight

Now I will say no more of the service, but that ye may know there was no lack, for there drew near a venture that the folk might well have left their labour to gaze upon. As the sound of the music ceased, and the first course had been fitly served, there came in at the hall door one terrible to behold, of stature greater than any on earth; from neck to loin so strong and thickly made, and with limbs so long and so great that he seemed even as a giant. And yet he was but a man, only the mightiest that might mount a steed; broad of chest and shoulders and slender of waist, and all his features of like fashion; but men marvelled much at his colour, for he rode even as a knight, yet was green all over.

The fashion of the knight

For he was clad all in green, with a straight coat, and a mantle above; all decked and lined with fur was the cloth and the hood that was thrown back from his locks and lay on his shoulders. Hose had he of the same green, and spurs of bright gold with silken fastenings richly worked; and all his vesture was verily green. Around his waist and his saddle were bands with fair stones set upon silken work, 'twere too long to tell of all the trifles that were embroidered thereon—birds and insects in gay gauds of green and gold.

Of the knight's steed

All the trappings of his steed were of metal of like enamel, even the stirrups that he stood in stained of the same, and stirrups and saddle-bow alike gleamed and shone with green stones. Even the steed on which he rode was of the same hue, a green horse, great and strong, and hard to hold, with broidered bridle, meet for the rider.

The knight was thus gaily dressed in green, his hair falling around his shoulders, on his breast hung a beard, as thick and green as a bush, and the beard and the hair of his head were clipped all round above his elbows. The lower part of his sleeves were

fastened with clasps in the same wise as a king's mantle. The horse's mane was crisped and plaited with many a knot folded in with gold thread about the fair green, here a twist of the hair, here another of gold.

The tail was twined in like manner, and both were bound about with a band of bright green set with many a precious stone; then they were tied aloft in a cunning knot, whereon rang many bells of burnished gold. Such a steed might no other ride, nor had such ever been looked upon in that hall ere that time; and all who saw that knight spake and said that a man might scarce abide his stroke.

The arming of the knight

The knight bore no helm nor hauberk, neither gorget nor breast-plate, neither shaft nor buckler to smite nor to shield, but in one hand he had a holly-bough, that is greenest when the groves are bare, and in his other an axe, huge and uncomely, a cruel weapon in fashion, if one would picture it. The head was an ell-yard long, the metal all of green steel and gold, the blade burnished bright, with a broad edge, as well shapen to shear as a sharp razor. The steel was set into a strong staff, all bound round with iron, even to the end, and engraved with green in cunning work. A lace was twined about it, that looped at the head, and all adown the handle it was clasped with tassels on buttons of bright green richly broidered.

The knight halted in the entrance of the hall, looking to the high daïs, and greeted no man, but looked ever upwards; and the first words he spake were, "Where is the ruler of this folk? I would gladly look upon that hero, and have speech with him." He cast his eyes on the knights, and mustered them up and down, striving ever to see who of them was of most renown.

Then was there great gazing to behold that chief, for each man marvelled what it might mean that a knight and his steed should have even such a hue as the green grass; and that seemed even greener than green enamel on bright gold. All looked on him as he stood, and drew near unto him wondering greatly what he might be; for many marvels had they seen, but none such as this, and phantasm and faërie did the folk deem it. Therefore were the gallant knights slow to answer, and gazed astounded, and sat stone still in a deep silence through that goodly hall, as if a slumber were fallen upon them. I deem it was not all for doubt, but some for courtesy that they might give ear unto his errand. Then Arthur beheld this adventure before his high daïs, and knightly he greeted him, for discourteous was he never. "Sir," he said, "thou art welcome to this place—lord of this hall am I, and men call me Arthur. Light thee down, and tarry awhile, and what thy will is, that shall we learn after."

Of the knight's challenge "Nay," quoth the stranger, "so help me He that sitteth on high, 'twas not mine errand to tarry any while in this dwelling; but the praise of this thy folk and thy city is lifted up on high, and thy warriors are holden for the best and the most valiant of those who ride mail-clad to the fight. The wisest and the worthiest of this world are they, and well proven in all knightly sports. And here, as I have heard tell, is fairest courtesy, therefore have I come hither as at this time. Ye may be sure by the branch that I bear here that I come in peace, seeking no strife. For had I willed to journey in warlike guise I have at home both hauberk and helm, shield and shining spear, and other weapons to mine hand, but since I seek no war my raiment is that of peace. But if thou be as bold as all men tell thou wilt freely grant me the boon I ask."

And Arthur answered, "Sir Knight, if thou cravest battle here thou shalt not fail for lack of a foe."

And the knight answered, "Nay, I ask no fight, in faith here on the benches are but beardless children, were I clad in armour on my steed there is no man here might match me. Therefore I ask in this court but a Christmas jest, for that it is Yule-tide, and New Year, and there are many here. If any one in this hall holds himself so hardy, so bold both of blood and brain, as to dare strike me one stroke for another, I will give him as a gift this axe, which is heavy enough, in sooth, to handle as he may list, and I will abide the first blow, unarmed as I sit. If any knight be so bold as to prove my words let him come swiftly to me here, and take this weapon, I quit claim to it, he may keep it as his own, and I will abide his stroke, firm on the floor. Then shalt thou give me the right to deal him another, the respite of a year from to-day shall he have. Now pledge me thy word, and let see whether any here dare say aught."

The silence of the knights

Now if the knights had been astounded at the first, yet stiller were they all, high and low, when they had heard his words. The knight on his steed straightened himself in the saddle, and rolled his eyes fiercely round the hall, red they gleamed under his green and bushy brows. He frowned and twisted his beard, waiting to see who should rise, and when none answered he cried aloud in mockery, "What, is this Arthur's hall, and these the knights whose renown hath run through many realms? Where are now your pride and your conquests, your wrath, and anger, and mighty words? Now are the praise and the renown of the Round Table overthrown by one man's speech, since all keep silence for dread ere ever they have seen a blow!"

With that he laughed so loudly that the blood rushed to the king's fair face for very shame; he waxed wroth, as did all his knights, and sprang to his feet, and drew near to the stranger and said, "Now by heaven foolish is thine asking, and thy folly shall find its fitting answer. I know no man aghast at thy great words. Give me here thine axe and I shall grant thee the boon thou hast asked." Lightly he sprang to him and caught at his hand, and the knight, fierce of aspect, lighted down from his charger.

Then Arthur took the axe and gripped the haft, and swung it round, ready to strike. And the knight stood before him, taller by the head than any in the hall; he stood, and stroked his beard, and drew down his coat, no more dismayed for the king's threats than if one had brought him a drink of wine.

How Sir Gawain dared the venture

Then Gawain, who sat by the queen, leaned forward to the king and spake, "I beseech ye, my lord, let this venture be mine. Would ye but bid me rise from this seat, and stand by your side, so that my liege lady thought it not ill, then would I come to your counsel before this goodly court. For I think it not seemly that such challenge should be made in your hall that ye yourself should undertake it, while there are many bold knights who sit beside ye, none are there, methinks, of readier will under heaven, or more valiant in open field. I am the weakest, I wot, and the feeblest of wit, and it will be the less loss of my life if ye seek sooth. For save that ye are mine uncle naught is there in me to praise, no virtue is there in my body save your blood, and since this challenge is such folly that it beseems ye not to take it, and I have asked it from ye first, let it fall to me, and if I bear myself ungallantly then let all this court blame me."

Then they all spake with one voice that the king should leave this venture and grant it to Gawain.

Then Arthur commanded the knight to rise, and he rose up quickly and knelt down before the king, and caught hold of the weapon; and the king loosed his hold of it, and lifted up his hand, and gave him his blessing, and bade him be strong both of heart and hand. "Keep thee well, nephew," quoth Arthur, "that thou give him but the one blow, and if thou redest him rightly I trow thou shalt well abide the stroke he may give thee after."

The making of the covenant

Gawain stepped to the stranger, axe in hand, and he, never fearing, awaited his coming. Then the Green Knight spake to Sir Gawain, "Make we our covenant ere we go further. First, I ask thee, knight, what is thy name? Tell me truly, that I may know thee."

"In faith," quoth the good knight, "Gawain am I, who give thee this buffet, let what may come of it; and at this time twelvemonth will I take another at thine hand with whatsoever weapon thou wilt, and none other."

Then the other answered again, "Sir Gawain, so may I thrive as I am fain to take this buffet at thine hand," and he quoth further, "Sir Gawain, it liketh me well that I shall take at thy fist that which I have asked here, and thou hast readily and

truly rehearsed all the covenant that I asked of the king, save that thou shalt swear me, by thy troth, to seek me thyself wherever thou hopest that I may be found, and win thee such reward as thou dealest me to-day, before this folk."

"Where shall I seek thee?" quoth Gawain. "Where is thy place? By Him that made me, I wot never where thou dwellest, nor know I thee, knight, thy court, nor thy name. But teach me truly all that pertaineth thereto, and tell me thy name, and I shall use all my wit to win my way thither, and that I swear thee for sooth, and by my sure troth."

"That is enough in the New Year, it needs no more," quoth the Green Knight to the gallant Gawain, "if I tell thee truly when I have taken the blow, and thou hast smitten me; then will I teach thee of my house and home, and mine own name, then mayest thou ask thy road and keep covenant. And if I waste no words then farest thou the better, for thou canst dwell in thy land, and seek no further. But take now thy toll, and let see how thy strikest."

"Gladly will I," quoth Gawain, handling his axe.

The giving of the blow Then the Green Knight swiftly made him ready, he bowed down his head, and laid his long locks on the crown that his bare neck might be seen. Gawain gripped his axe and raised it on high, the left foot he set forward on the floor, and let the blow fall lightly on the bare neck. The sharp edge of the blade sundered the bones, smote through the neck, and clave it in two, so that the edge of the steel bit on the ground, and the head rolled even to the horse's feet.

The marvel of the Green Knight

The blood spurted forth, and glistened on the green raiment, but the knight neither faltered nor fell; he started forward with out-stretched hand, and caught the head, and lifted it up; then he turned to his steed, and took hold of the bridle, set his foot in the stirrup, and mounted. His head he held by the hair, in his hand. Then he seated himself in his saddle as if naught ailed him, and he were not headless. He turned his steed about, the grim corpse bleeding freely the while, and they who looked upon him doubted them much for the covenant.

For he held up the head in his hand, and turned the face towards them that sat on the high daïs, and it lifted up the eye-lids and looked upon them, and spake as ye shall hear. "Look, Gawain, that thou art ready to go as thou hast promised, and seek leally till thou find me, even as thou hast sworn in this hall in the hearing of these knights. Come thou, I charge thee, to the Green Chapel, such a stroke as thou hast dealt thou hast deserved, and it shall be promptly paid thee on New Year's morn. Many men know me as the knight of the Green Chapel, and if thou askest thou shalt not fail to find me. Therefore it behoves thee to come, or to yield thee as recreant."

With that he turned his bridle, and galloped out at the hall door, his head in his hands, so that the sparks flew from beneath his horse's hoofs. Whither he went none knew, no more than they wist whence he had come; and the king and Gawain they gazed and laughed, for in sooth this had proved a greater marvel than any they had known aforetime.

Though Arthur the king was astonished at his heart, yet he let no sign of it be seen, but spake in courteous wise to the fair queen: "Dear lady, be not dismayed, such craft is well suited to Christmas-tide when we seek jesting, laughter and song, and fair carols of knights and ladies. But now I may well get me to meat, for I have seen a marvel I may not forget." Then he looked on Sir Gawain, and said gaily, "Now, fair nephew, hang up thine axe, since it has hewn enough," and they hung it on the dossal above the daïs, where all men might look on it for a marvel, and by its true token tell of the wonder. Then the twain sat them down together, the king and the good knight, and men served them with a double portion, as was the share of the noblest, with all manner of meat and of minstrelsy. And they spent that day in gladness, but Sir Gawain must well bethink him of the heavy venture to which he had set his hand.

This beginning of adventures had Arthur at the New Year, for he yearned to hear gallant tales, though his words were few when he sat at the feast. But now had they stern work on hand. Gawain was glad to begin the jest in the hall, but ye need have no marvel if the end be heavy. For though a man be merry in mind when he has well drunk, yet a year runs full swiftly, and the beginning but rarely matches the end.

Fitt II The waning of the year

For Yule was now over-past, and the year after, each season in its turn following the other. For after Christmas comes crabbed Lent, that will have fish for flesh and simpler cheer. But then the weather of the world chides with winter; the cold withdraws itself, the clouds uplift, and the rain falls in warm showers on the fair plains. Then the flowers come forth, meadows and groves are clad in green, the birds make ready to build, and sing sweetly for solace of the soft summer that follows thereafter. The blossoms bud and blow in the hedgerows rich and rank, and noble notes enough are heard in the fair woods.

After the season of summer, with the soft winds, when zephyr breathes lightly on seeds and herbs, joyous indeed is the growth that waxes thereout when the dew drips from the leaves beneath the blissful glance of the bright sun. But then comes harvest and hardens the grain, warning it to wax ripe ere the winter. The drought drives the dust on high, flying over the face of the land; the angry wind of the welkin wrestles with the sun; the leaves fall from the trees and light upon the ground, and all brown are the groves that but now were green, and ripe is the fruit that once was flower. So the year passes into many yesterdays, and winter comes again, as it needs no sage to tell us.

Sir Gawain bethinks him of his covenant

Edmund Leighton, God Speed! (1900)

When the Michaelmas moon was come in with warnings of winter, Sir Gawain bethought him full oft of his perilous journey. Yet till All Hallows Day he lingered with Arthur, and on that day they made a great feast for the hero's sake, with much revel and richness of the Round Table. Courteous knights and comely ladies, all were in sorrow for the love of that knight, and though they spake no word of it many were joyless for his sake.
And after meat, sadly Sir Gawain turned to his uncle, and spake of his journey, and said, "Liege lord of my life, leave from you I crave. Ye know well how the matter stands without more words, to-morrow am I bound to set forth in search of the Green Knight."

Then came together all the noblest knights, Ywain and Erec, and many another. Sir Dodinel le Sauvage, Launcelot and Lionel, and Lucan the Good, Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere, valiant knights both, and many another hero, with Sir Mador de la Porte, and they all drew near, heavy at heart, to take counsel with Sir Gawain. Much sorrow and weeping was there in the hall to think that so worthy a knight as Gawain should wend his way to seek a deadly blow, and should no more wield his sword in fight. But the knight made ever good cheer, and said, "Nay, wherefore should I shrink? What may a man do but prove his fate?"

The arming of Sir Gawain

He dwelt there all that day, and on the morn he arose and asked betimes for his armour; and they brought it unto him on this wise: first, a rich carpet was stretched on the floor (and brightly did the gold gear glitter upon it), then the knight stepped on to it, and handled the steel; clad he was in a doublet of silk, with a close hood, lined fairly throughout. Then they set the steel shoes upon his feet, and wrapped his legs with greaves, with polished knee-caps fastened with knots of gold. Then they cased his thighs in cuisses closed with thongs, and brought him the byrny of bright steel rings sewn upon a fair stuff. Well burnished braces they set on each arm with good elbow-pieces, and gloves of mail, and all the goodly ear that should shield him in his need. And they cast over all a rich surcoat, and set the golden spurs on his heels, and girt him with a trusty sword fastened with a silken bawdrick. When he was thus clad his harness was costly, for the least loop or latchet gleamed with gold. So armed as he was he hearkened Mass and made his offering at the high altar. Then he came to the king, and the knights of his court, and courteously took leave of lords and ladies, and they kissed him, and commended him to Christ.

With that was Gringalet ready, girt with a saddle that gleamed gaily with many golden fringes, enriched and decked anew for the venture. The bridle was all barred about with bright gold buttons, and all the covertures and trappings of the steed, the crupper and the rich skirts, accorded with the saddle; spread fair with the rich red gold that glittered and gleamed in the rays of the sun.

Then the knight called for his helmet, which was well lined throughout, and set it high on his head, and hasped it behind. He wore a light kerchief over the vintail, that was broidered and studded with fair gems on a broad silken ribbon, with birds of gay colour, and many a turtle and true-lover's knot interlaced thickly, even as many a maiden had wrought them. But the circlet which crowned his helmet was yet more precious, being adorned with a device in diamonds. Then they brought him his shield, which was of bright red, with the pentangle painted thereon in gleaming gold.

Wherefore Sir Gawain bare the pentangle

And why that noble prince bare the pentangle I am minded to tell you, though my tale tarry thereby. It is a sign that Solomon set ere-while, as betokening truth; for it is a figure with five points and each line overlaps the other, and nowhere hath it beginning or end, so that in English it is called "the endless knot." And therefore was it well suiting to this knight and to his arms, since Gawain was faithful in five and five-fold, for pure was he as gold, void of all villainy and endowed with all virtues. Therefore he bare the pentangle on shield and surcoat as truest of heroes and gentlest of knights.

For first he was faultless in his five senses; and his five fingers never failed him; and all his trust upon earth was in the five wounds that Christ bare on the cross, as the Creed tells. And wherever this knight found himself in stress of battle he deemed well that he drew his strength from the five joys which the Queen of Heaven had of her Child. And for this cause did he bear an image of Our Lady on the one half of his shield, that whenever he looked upon it he might not lack for aid. And the fifth five that the hero used were frankness and fellowship above all, purity and courtesy that never failed him, and compassion that surpasses all; and in these five virtues was that hero wrapped and clothed. And all these, five-fold, were linked one in the other, so that they had no end, and were fixed on five points that never failed, neither at any side were they joined or sundered, nor could ye find beginning or end. And therefore on his shield was the knot shapen, red-gold upon red, which is the pure pentangle. Now was Sir Gawain ready, and he took his lance in hand, and bade them all Farewell, he deemed it had been for ever.

How Sir Gawain went forth

Then he smote the steed with his spurs, and sprang on his way, so that sparks flew from the stones after him. All that saw him were grieved at heart, and said one to the other, "By Christ, 'tis great pity that one of such noble life should be lost! I' faith, 'twere not easy to find his equal upon earth. The king had done better to have wrought more warily. Yonder knight should have been made a duke; a gallant leader of men is he, and such a fate had beseemed him better than to be hewn in pieces at the will of an elfish man, for mere pride. Who ever knew a king to take such counsel as to risk his knights on a Christmas jest?" Many were the tears that flowed from their eyes when that goodly knight rode from the hall. He made no delaying, but went his way swiftly, and rode many a wild road, as I heard say in the book.

Of Sir Gawain's journey

So rode Sir Gawain through the realm of Logres, on an errand that he held for no jest. Often he lay companionless at night, and must lack the fare that he liked. No comrade had he save his steed, and none save God with whom to take counsel. At length he drew nigh to North Wales, and left the isles of Anglesey on his left hand, crossing over the fords by the foreland over at Holyhead, till he came into the wilderness of Wirral, that is loved neither of God nor of man, and there he abode but a little time. And ever he asked, as he fared, of all whom he met, if they had heard any tidings of a Green Knight in the country thereabout, or of a Green Chapel? And all answered him, Nay, never in their lives had they seen any man of such a hue. And the knight wended his way by many a strange road and many a rugged path, and the fashion of his countenance changed full often ere he saw the Green Chapel.

Many a cliff did he climb in that unknown land, where afar from his friends he rode as a stranger. Never did he come to a stream or a ford but he found a foe before him, and that one so marvellous, so foul and fell, that it behoved him to fight. So many wonders did that knight behold that it were too long to tell the tenth part of them. Sometimes he fought with dragons and wolves; sometimes with wild men that dwelt in the rocks; another while with bulls, and bears, and wild boars, or with giants of the high moorland that drew near to him. Had he not been a doughty knight, enduring, and of well-proved valour, doubtless he had been slain, for he was oft in danger of death. Yet he cared not so much for the strife, what he deemed worse was when the cold clear water was shed from the clouds, and froze ere it fell on the fallow ground. More nights than enough he slept in his harness on the bare rocks, near slain with the sleet, while the stream leapt bubbling from the crest of the hills, and hung in hard icicles over his head.

Thus in peril and pain, and many a hardship, the knight rode alone till Christmas Eve, and in that tide he made his prayer to the Blessed Virgin that she would guide his steps and lead him to some dwelling. On that morning he rode by a hill, and came into a thick forest, wild and drear; on each side were high hills, and thick woods below them of great hoar oaks, a hundred together,

of hazel and hawthorn with their trailing boughs intertwined, and rough ragged moss spreading everywhere. On the bare twigs the birds chirped piteously, for pain of the cold. The knight upon Gringalet rode lonely beneath them, through marsh and mire, much troubled at heart lest he should fail to see the service of the Lord, who on that self-same night was born of a Maiden for the cure of our grief; and therefore he said, sighing, "I beseech Thee, Lord, and Mary Thy gentle Mother, for some shelter where I may hear Mass, and Thy mattins at morn. This I ask meekly, and thereto I pray my Paternoster, Ave, and Credo." Thus he rode praying, and lamenting his misdeeds, and he crossed himself, and said, "May the Cross of Christ speed me."

How Sir Gawain came to a fair castle on Christmas Eve

Now that knight had crossed himself but thrice ere he was aware in the wood of a dwelling within a moat, above a lawn, on a mound surrounded by many mighty trees that stood round the moat. 'Twas the fairest castle that ever a knight owned; built in a meadow with a park all about it, and a spiked palisade, closely driven, that enclosed the trees for more than two miles. The knight was ware of the hold from the side, as it shone through the oaks. Then he lifted off his helmet, and thanked Christ and S. Julian that they had courteously granted his prayer, and hearkened to his cry. "Now," quoth the knight, "I beseech ye, grant me fair hostel." Then he pricked Gringalet with his golden spurs, and rode gaily towards the great gate, and came swiftly to the bridge end.

The bridge was drawn up and the gates close shut; the walls were strong and thick, so that they might fear no tempest. The knight on his charger abode on the bank of the deep double ditch that surrounded the castle. The walls were set deep in the water, and rose aloft to a wondrous height; they were of hard hewn stone up to the corbels, which were adorned beneath the battlements with fair carvings, and turrets set in between with many a loophole; a better barbican Sir Gawain had never looked upon. And within he beheld the high hall, with its tower and many windows with carven cornices, and chalk-white chimneys on the turreted roofs that shone fair in the sun. And everywhere, thickly scattered on the castle battlements, were pinnacles, so many that it seemed as if it were all wrought out of paper, so white was it.

The knight on his steed deemed it fair enough, if he might come to be sheltered within it to lodge there while that the Holy-day lasted. He called aloud, and soon there came a porter of kindly countenance, who stood on the wall and greeted this knight and asked his errand.

"Good sir," quoth Gawain, "wilt thou go mine errand to the high lord of the castle, and crave for me lodging?"

"Yea, by S. Peter," quoth the porter. "In sooth I trow that ye be welcome to dwell here so long as it may like ye."

How Sir Gawain was welcomed

Then he went, and came again swiftly, and many folk with him to receive the knight. They let down the great drawbridge, and came forth and knelt on their knees on the cold earth to give him worthy welcome. They held wide open the great gates, and he greeted them courteously, and rode over the bridge. Then men came to him and held his stirrup while he dismounted, and took and stabled his steed. There came down knights and squires to bring the guest with joy to the hall. When he raised his helmet there were many to take it from his hand, fain to serve him, and they took from him sword and shield.

Sir Gawain gave good greeting to the nobles and the mighty men who came to do him honour. Clad in his shining armour they led him to the hall, where a great fire burnt brightly on the floor; and the lord of the household came forth from his chamber to meet the hero fitly. He spake to the knight, and said: "Ye are welcome to do here as it likes ye. All that is here is your own to have at your will and disposal."

"Gramercy!" quote Gawain, "may Christ requite ye."

As friends that were fain each embraced the other; and Gawain looked on the knight who greeted him so kindly, and thought 'twas a bold warrior that owned that burg.

Of mighty stature he was, and of high age; broad and flowing was his beard, and of a bright hue. He was stalwart of limb, and strong in his stride, his face fiery red, and his speech free: in sooth he seemed one well fitted to be a leader of valiant men. Then the lord led Sir Gawain to a chamber, and commanded folk to wait upon him, and at his bidding there came men enough who brought the guest to a fair bower. The bedding was noble, with curtains of pure silk wrought with gold, and wondrous coverings of fair cloth all embroidered. The curtains ran on ropes with rings of red gold, and the walls were hung with carpets of Orient, and the same spread on the floor. There with mirthful speeches they took from the guest his byrny and all his shining armour, and brought him rich robes of the choicest in its stead. They were long and flowing, and became him well, and when he was clad in them all who looked on the hero thought that surely God had never made a fairer knight: he seemed as if he might be a prince without peer in the field where men strive in battle.

Then before the hearth-place, whereon the fire burned, they made ready a chair for Gawain, hung about with cloth and fair cushions; and there they cast around him a mantle of brown samite, richly embroidered and furred within with costly skins of ermine, with a hood of the same, and he seated himself in that rich seat, and warmed himself at the fire and was cheered at heart. And while he sat thus the serving men set up a table on trestles, and covered it with a fair white cloth, and set thereon salt-cellar, and napkin, and silver spoons; and the knight washed at his will, and set him down to meat.

The folk served him courteously with many dishes seasoned of the best, a double portion. All kinds of fish were there, some baked in bread, some broiled on the embers, some sodden, some stewed and savoured with spices, with all sorts of cunning devices to his taste. And often he called it a feast, when they spake gaily to him all together, and said, "Now take ye this penance, and it shall be for your amendment." Much mirth thereof did Sir Gawain make.

Sir Gawain tells his name

Then they questioned that prince courteously of whence he came; and he told them that he was of the court of Arthur, who is the rich royal King of the Round Table, and that it was Gawain himself who was within their walls, and would keep Christmas with them, as the chance had fallen out. And when the lord of the castle heard those tidings he laughed aloud for gladness, and all men in that keep were joyful that they should be in the company of him to whom belonged all fame, and valour, and courtesy, and whose honour was praised above that of all men on earth. Each said softly to his fellow, "Now shall we see courteous bearing, and the manner of speech befitting courts. What charm lieth in gentle speech shall we learn without asking, since here we have welcomed the fine father of courtesy. God has surely shewn us His grace since He sends us such a guest as Gawain! When men shall sit and sing, blithe for Christ's birth, this knight shall bring us to the knowledge of fair manners, and it may be that hearing him we may learn the cunning speech of love."

By the time the knight had risen from dinner it was near nightfall. Then chaplains took their way to the chapel, and rang loudly, even as they should, for the solemn evensong of the high feast. Thither went the lord, and the lady also, and entered with her maidens into a comely closet, and thither also went Gawain. Then the lord took him by the sleeve and led him to a seat, and called him by his name, and told him he was of all men in the world the most welcome. And Sir Gawain thanked him truly, and each kissed the other, and they sat gravely together throughout the service.

The lady of the castle

Then was the lady fain to look upon that knight; and she came forth from her closet with many fair maidens. The fairest of ladies was she in face, and figure, and colouring, fairer even than Guinevere, so the knight thought. She came through the chancel to greet the hero, another lady held her by the left hand, older than she, and seemingly of high estate, with many nobles about her. But unlike to look upon were those ladies, for if the younger

were fair, the elder was yellow. Rich red werethe cheeks of the one, rough and wrinkled those of the other; the kerchiefs of the one were broidered with many glistening pearls, her throat and neck bare, and whiter than the snow that lies on the hills; the neck of the other was swathed in a gorget, with a white wimple over her black chin. Her forehead was wrapped in silk with many folds, worked with knots, so that naught of her was seen save her black brows, her eyes, her nose, and her lips, and those were bleared, and ill to look upon. A worshipful lady in sooth one might call her! In figure was she short and broad, and thickly made—far fairer to behold was she whom she led by the hand.

When Gawain beheld that fair lady, who looked at him graciously, with leave of the lord he went towards them, and, bowing low, he greeted the elder, but the younger and fairer he took lightly in his arms, and kissed her courteously, and greeted her in knightly wise. Then she hailed him as friend, and he quickly prayed to be counted as her servant, if she so willed. Then they took him between them, and talking, led him to the chamber, to the hearth, and bade them bring spices, and they brought them in plenty with the good wine that was wont to be drunk at such seasons. Then the lord sprang to his feet and bade them make merry, and took off his hood, and hung it on a spear, and bade him win the worship thereof who should make most mirth that Christmas-tide. "And I shall try, by my faith, to fool it with the best, by the help of my friends, ere I lose my raiment." Thus with gay words the lord made trial to gladden Gawain with jests that night, till it was time to bid them light the tapers, and Sir Gawain took leave of them and gat him to rest.

Of the Christmas feast

In the morn when all men call to mind how Christ our Lord was born on earth to die for us, there is joy, for His sake, in all dwellings of the world; and so was there here on that day. For high feast was held, with many dainties and cunningly cooked messes. On the daïs sat gallant men, clad in their best. The ancient dame sat on the high seat, with the lord of the castle beside her. Gawain and the fair lady sat together, even in the midst of the board, when the feast was served; and so throughout all the hall each sat in his degree, and was served in order. There was meat, there was mirth, there was much joy, so that to tell thereof would take me too long, though peradventure I might strive to declare it. But Gawain and that fair lady had much joy of each other's company through her sweet words and courteous converse. And there was music made before each prince, trumpets and drums, and merry piping; each man hearkened his minstrel, and they too hearkened theirs.

How the feast came to an end but Gawain abode at the castle

So they held high feast that day and the next, and the third day thereafter, and the joy on S. John's Day was fair to hearken, for 'twas the last of the feast, and the guests would depart in the grey of the morning. Therefore they awoke early, and drank wine, and danced fair carols, and at last, when it was late, each man took his leave to wend early on his way. Gawain would bid his host farewell, but the lord took him by the hand, and led him to his own chamber beside the hearth, and there he thanked him for the favour he had shown him in honouring his dwelling at that high season, and gladdening his castle with his fair countenance. "I wis, sir, that while I live I shall be held the worthier that Gawain has been my guest at God's own feast."

"Gramercy, sir," quoth Gawain, "in good faith, all the honour is yours, may the High King give it ye, and I am but at your will to work your behest, inasmuch as I am beholden to ye in great and small by rights."

Then the lord did his best to persuade the knight to tarry with him, but Gawain answered that he might in no wise do so. Then the host asked him courteously what stern behest had driven him at the holy season from the king's court, to fare all alone, ere yet the feast was ended?

"Forsooth," quoth the knight, "ye say but the truth: 'tis a high quest and a pressing that hath brought me afield, for I am summoned myself to a certain place, and I know not whither in the world I may wend to find it; so help me Christ, I would give all the kingdom of Logres an I might find it by New Year's morn. Therefore, sir, I make request of ye that ye tell me truly if ye ever heard word of the Green Chapel, where it may be found, and the Green Knight that keeps it. For I am pledged by solemn compact sworn between us to meet that knight at the New Year if so I were on life; and of that same New Year it wants but little—I' faith, I would look on that hero more joyfully than on any other fair sight! Therefore, by your will, it behoves me to leave ye, for I have but barely three days, and I would as fain fall dead as fail of mine errand."

Then the lord quoth, laughing, "Now must ye needs stay, for I will show ye your goal, the Green Chapel, ere your term be at an end, have ye no fear! But ye can take your ease, friend, in your bed, till the fourth day, and go forth on the first of the year, and come to that place at mid-morn to do as ye will. Dwell here till New Year's Day, and then rise and set forth, and ye shall be set in the way; 'tis not two miles hence."

Then was Gawain glad, and he laughed gaily. "Now I thank ye for this above all else. Now my quest is achieved I will dwell here at your will, and otherwise do as ye shall ask."

Then the lord took him, and set him beside him, and bade the ladies be fetched for their greater pleasure, tho' between themselves they had solace. The lord, for gladness, made merry jest, even as one who wist not what to do for joy; and he cried aloud to the knight, "Ye have promised to do the thing I bid ye: will ye hold to this behest, here, at once?"

"Yea, forsooth," said that true knight, "while I abide in your burg I am bound by your behest."

"Ye have travelled from far," said the host, "and since then ye have waked with me, ye are not well refreshed by rest and sleep, as I know. Ye shall therefore abide in your chamber, and lie at your ease to-morrow at Mass-tide, and go to meat when ye will with my wife, who shall sit with ye, and comfort ye with her company till I return; and I shall rise early and go forth to the chase." And Gawain agreed to all this courteously.

Sir Gawain makes a covenant with his host

"Sir knight," quoth the host, "we will make a covenant. Whatsoever I win in the wood shall be yours, and whatever may fall to your share, that shall ye exchange for it. Let us swear, friend, to make this exchange, however our hap may be, for worse or for better."

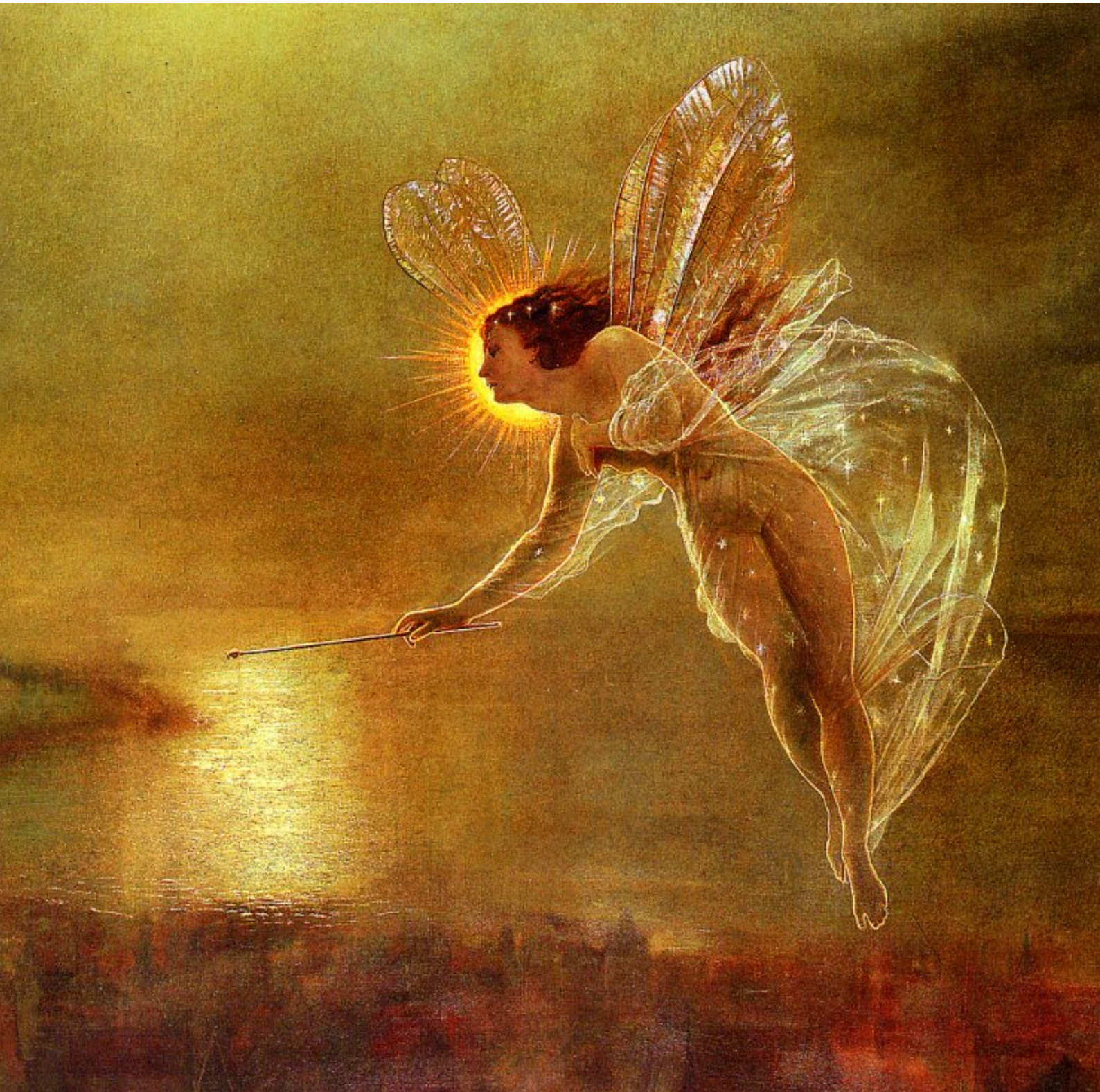
"I grant ye your will," quoth Gawain the good; "if ye list so to do, it liketh me well."

"Bring hither the wine-cup, the bargain is made," so said the lord of that castle. They laughed each one, and drank of the wine, and made merry, these lords and ladies, as it pleased them. Then with gay talk and merry jest they arose, and stood, and spoke softly, and kissed courteously, and took leave of each other. With burning torches, and many a serving man, was each led to his couch; yet ere they gat them to bed the old lord oft repeated their covenant, for he knew well how to make sport.

A Christmas Fairy

Henrietta Eliza Vaughan Stannard

Spirit of the Night



It was getting very near to Christmas time, and all the boys at Miss Ware's school were talking about going home for the holidays.

"I shall go to the Christmas festival," said Bertie Fellows, "and my mother will have a party, and my Aunt will give another. Oh! I shall have a splendid time at home."

"My Uncle Bob is going to give me a pair of skates," remarked Harry Wadham.

"My father is going to give me a bicycle," put in George Alderson.

"Will you bring it back to school with you?" asked Harry.

"Oh! yes, if Miss Ware doesn't say no."

"Well, Tom," cried Bertie, "where are you going to spend your holidays?"

"I am going to stay here," answered Tom in a very forlorn voice.

"Here—at school—oh, dear! Why can't you go home?"

"I can't go home to India," answered Tom.

"Nobody said you could. But haven't you any relatives anywhere?"

Tom shook his head. "Only in India," he said sadly.

"Poor fellow! That's hard luck for you. I'll tell you what it is, boys, if I couldn't go home for the holidays, especially at Christmas—I think I would just sit down and die."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," said Tom. "You would get ever so homesick, but you wouldn't die. You would just get through somehow, and hope something would happen before next year, or that some kind fairy would—"

"There are no fairies nowadays," said Bertie.

"See here, Tom, I'll write and ask my mother to invite you to go home with me for the holidays."

"Will you really?"

"Yes, I will. And if she says yes, we shall have such a splendid time. We live in London, you know, and have lots of parties and fun."

"Perhaps she will say no?" suggested poor little Tom.

"My mother isn't the kind that says no," Bertie declared loudly.

In a few days' time a letter arrived from Bertie's mother. The boy opened it eagerly. It said:

My own dear Bertie:

I am very sorry to tell you that little Alice is ill with scarlet fever. And so you cannot come for your holidays. I would have been glad to have you bring your little friend with you if all had been well here.

Your father and I have decided that the best thing that you can do is to stay at Miss Ware's. We shall send your Christmas present to you as well as we can.

It will not be like coming home, but I am sure you will try to be happy, and make me feel that you are helping me in this sad time.

Dear little Alice is very ill, very ill indeed. Tell Tom that I am sending you a box for both of you, with two of everything. And tell him that it makes me so much happier to know that you will not be alone.

Your own mother.

When Bertie Fellows received this letter, which ended all his Christmas hopes and joys, he hid his face upon his desk and sobbed aloud. The lonely boy from India, who sat next to him, tried to comfort his friend in every way he could think of. He patted his shoulder and whispered many kind words to him.

At last Bertie put the letter into Tom's hands. "Read it," he sobbed.

So then Tom understood the cause of Bertie's grief. "Don't fret over it," he said at last. "It might be worse. Why, your father and mother might be thousands of miles away, like mine are. When Alice is better, you will be able to go home. And it will help your mother if she thinks you are almost as happy as if you could go now."

Soon Miss Ware came to tell Bertie how sorry she was for him. "After all," said she, smiling down on the two boys, "it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Poor Tom has been expecting to spend his holidays alone, and now he will have a friend with him—Try to look on the bright side, Bertie, and to remember how much worse it would have been if there had been no boy to stay with you.

"I can't help being disappointed, Miss Ware," said Bertie, his eyes
filling with tears.

"No; you would be a strange boy if you were not. But I want you to try to think of your poor mother, and write her as cheerfully as you can."

"Yes," answered Bertie; but his heart was too full to say more.

The last day of the term came, and one by one, or two by two, the boys went away, until only Bertie and Tom were left in the great house. It had never seemed so large to either of them before.

"It's miserable," groaned poor Bertie, as they strolled into the schoolroom. "Just think if we were on our way home now—how different."

"Just think if I had been left here by myself," said Tom.

"Yes," said Bertie, "but you know when one wants to go home he never thinks of the boys that have no home to go to."

The evening passed, and the two boys went to bed. They told stories to each other for a long time before they could go to sleep. That night they dreamed of their homes, and felt very lonely. Yet each tried to be brave, and so another day began.

This was the day before Christmas. Quite early in the morning came the great box of which Bertie's mother had spoken in her letter. Then, just as dinner had come to an end, there was a peal of the bell, and a voice was heard asking for Tom Egerton.

Tom sprang to his feet, and flew to greet a tall, handsome lady, crying, "Aunt Laura! Aunt Laura!"

And Laura explained that she and her husband had arrived in London only the day before. "I was so afraid, Tom," she said, "that we should not get here until Christmas Day was over and that you would be disappointed. So I would not let your mother write you that we were on our way home. You must get your things packed up at once, and go back with me to London. Then uncle and I will give you a splendid time."

For a minute or two Tom's face shone with delight. Then he caught sight of Bertie and turned to his aunt.

"Dear Aunt Laura," he said, "I am very sorry, but I can't go."

"Can't go? and why not?"

"Because I can't go and leave Bertie here all alone," he said stoutly. "When I was going to be alone he wrote and asked his mother to let me go home with him. She could not have either of us because Bertie's sister has scarlet fever. He has to stay here, and he has never been away from home at Christmas time before, and I can't go away and leave him by himself, Aunt Laura."

For a minute Aunt Laura looked at the boy as if she could not believe him. Then she caught him in her arms and kissed him. "You dear little boy, you shall not leave him. You shall bring him along, and we shall all enjoy ourselves together. Bertie, my boy, you are not very old yet, but I am going to teach you a lesson as well as I can. It is that kindness is never wasted in this world."

And so Bertie and Tom found that there was such a thing as a fairy after all.

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS AS WE GROW OLDER.

Charles Dickens

Christmas-Eve John Everett Millais

Time was, with most of us, when Christmas Day encircling all our limited world like a magic ring, left nothing out for us to miss or seek; bound together all our home enjoyments, affections, and hopes; grouped everything and every one around the Christmas fire; and made the little picture shining in our bright young eyes, complete.

Time came, perhaps, all so soon, when our thoughts over-leaped that narrow boundary; when there was some one (very dear, we thought then, very beautiful, and absolutely perfect) wanting to the fulness of our happiness; when we were wanting too (or we thought so, which did just as well) at the Christmas hearth by which that some one sat; and when we intertwined with every wreath and garland of our life that some one's name.

That was the time for the bright visionary Christmases which have long arisen from us to show faintly, after summer rain, in the palest edges of the rainbow! That was the time for the beatified enjoyment of the things that were to be, and never were, and yet the things that were so real in our resolute hope that it would be hard to say, now, what realities achieved since, have been stronger!

What! Did that Christmas never really come when we and the priceless pearl who was our young choice were received, after the happiest of totally impossible marriages, by the two united families previously at daggers—drawn on our account? When brothers and sisters-in-law who had always been rather cool to us before our relationship was effected, perfectly doted on us, and when fathers and mothers overwhelmed us with unlimited incomes? Was that Christmas dinner never really eaten, after which we arose, and generously and eloquently rendered honour to our late rival, present in the company, then and there exchanging friendship and forgiveness, and founding an attachment, not to be surpassed in Greek or Roman story, which subsisted until death? Has that same rival long ceased to care for that same priceless pearl, and married for money, and become usurious? Above all, do we really know, now, that we should probably have been miserable if we had won and worn the pearl, and that we are better without her?

That Christmas when we had recently achieved so much fame; when we had been carried in triumph somewhere, for doing something great and good; when we had won an honoured and ennobled name, and arrived and were received at home in a shower of tears of joy; is it possible that that Christmas has not come yet?

And is our life here, at the best, so constituted that, pausing as we advance at such a noticeable mile-stone in the track as this great birthday, we look back on the things that never were, as naturally and full as gravely as on the things that have been and are gone, or have been and still are? If it be so, and so it seems to be, must we come to the conclusion that life is little better than a dream, and little worth the loves and strivings that we crowd into it?

No! Far be such miscalled philosophy from us, dear Reader, on Christmas Day! Nearer and closer to our hearts be the Christmas spirit, which is the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness and forbearance! It is in the last virtues especially, that we are, or should be, strengthened by the unaccomplished visions of our youth; for, who shall say that they are not our teachers to deal gently even with the impalpable nothings of the earth!

Therefore, as we grow older, let us be more thankful that the circle of our Christmas associations and of the lessons that they bring, expands! Let us welcome every one of them, and summon them to take their places by the Christmas hearth.

Welcome, old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy, to your shelter underneath the holly! We know you, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves, however fleeting, to your nooks among the steadier lights that burn around us. Welcome, all that was ever real to our hearts; and for the earnestness that made you real, thanks to Heaven! Do we build no Christmas castles in the clouds now? Let our thoughts, fluttering like butterflies among these flowers of children, bear witness! Before this boy, there stretches out a Future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honour and with truth. Around this little head on which the sunny curls lie heaped, the graces sport, as prettily, as airily, as when there was no scythe within the reach of Time to shear away the curls of our first-love. Upon another girl's face near it—placider but smiling bright—a quiet and contented little face, we see Home fairly written. Shining from the word, as rays shine from a star, we see how, when our graves are old, other hopes than ours are young, other hearts than ours are moved; how other ways are smoothed; how other happiness blooms, ripens, and decays—no, not decays, for other homes and other bands of children, not yet in being nor for ages yet to be, arise, and bloom and ripen to the end of all!

Welcome, everything! Welcome, alike what has been, and what never was, and what we hope may be, to your shelter underneath the holly, to your places round the Christmas fire, where what is sits open-hearted! In yonder shadow, do we see obtruding furtively upon the blaze, an enemy's face? By Christmas Day we do forgive him! If the injury he has done us may admit of such companionship, let him come here and take his place. If otherwise, unhappily, let him go hence, assured that we will never injure nor accuse him.

On this day we shut out Nothing!

"Pause," says a low voice. "Nothing? Think!"

"On Christmas Day, we will shut out from our fireside, Nothing."

"Not the shadow of a vast City where the withered leaves are lying deep?" the voice replies. "Not the shadow that darkens the whole globe? Not the shadow of the City of the Dead?"

Not even that. Of all days in the year, we will turn our faces towards that City upon Christmas Day, and from its silent hosts bring those we loved, among us. City of the Dead, in the blessed name wherein we are gathered together at this time, and in the Presence that is here among us according to the promise, we will receive, and not dismiss, thy people who are dear to us!

Yes. We can look upon these children angels that alight, so solemnly, so beautifully among the living children by the fire, and can bear to think how they departed from us. Entertaining angels unawares, as the Patriarchs did, the playful children are unconscious of their guests; but we can see them—can see a radiant arm around one favourite neck, as if there were a tempting of that child away. Among the celestial figures there is one, a poor misshapen boy on earth, of a glorious beauty now, of whom his dying mother said it grieved her much to leave him here, alone, for so many years as it was likely would elapse before he came to her—being such a little child. But he went quickly, and was laid upon her breast, and in her hand she leads him.

There was a gallant boy, who fell, far away, upon a burning sand beneath a burning sun, and said, "Tell them at home, with my last love, how much I could have wished to kiss them once, but that I died contented and had done my duty!" Or there was another, over whom they read the words, "Therefore we commit his body to the deep," and so consigned him to the lonely ocean and sailed on. Or there was another, who lay down to his rest in the dark shadow of great forests, and, on earth, awoke no more. O shall they not, from sand and sea and forest, be brought home at such a time!

There was a dear girl—almost a woman—never to be one—who made a mourning Christmas in a house of joy, and went her trackless way to the silent City. Do we recollect her, worn out, faintly whispering what could not be heard, and falling into that last sleep for weariness? O look upon her now! O look upon her beauty, her serenity, her changeless youth, her happiness! The daughter of Jairus was recalled to life, to die; but she, more blest, has heard the same voice, saying unto her, "Arise for ever!"

We had a friend who was our friend from early days, with whom we often pictured the changes that were to come upon our lives, and merrily imagined how we would speak, and walk, and think, and talk, when we came to be old. His destined habitation in the City of the Dead received him in his prime. Shall he be shut out from our Christmas remembrance? Would his love have so excluded us? Lost friend, lost child, lost parent, sister, brother,

husband, wife, we will not so discard you! You shall hold your cherished places in our Christmas hearts, and by our Christmas fires; and in the season of immortal hope, and on the birthday of immortal mercy, we will shut out Nothing!

The winter sun goes down over town and village; on the sea it makes a rosy path, as if the Sacred tread were fresh upon the water. A few more moments, and it sinks, and night comes on, and lights begin to sparkle in the prospect. On the hill-side beyond the shapelessly-diffused town, and in the quiet keeping of the trees that gird the village-steeple, remembrances are cut in stone, planted in common flowers, growing in grass, entwined with lowly brambles around many a mound of earth. In town and village, there are doors and windows closed against the weather, there are flaming logs heaped high, there are joyful faces, there is healthy music of voices. Be all ungentleness and harm excluded from the temples of the Household Gods, but be those remembrances admitted with tender encouragement! They are of the time and all its comforting and peaceful reassurances; and of the history that re-united even upon earth the living and the dead; and of the broad beneficence and goodness that too many men have tried to tear to narrow shreds.

Echo Mocks the Corncraik

Scottish Folk Song

Oh, the lass that I lo'ed first of a' was handsome, young and fair,
We had aye spent some merry nights upon the banks o' Ayr.
We had aye spent some merry nights way on wee burnie rows,
Whaur the echo mocks the corncrake amang the whinny knowes.
We loved each other dearly and disputes we seldom had
As constant as the pendulum, her heart beat always glad.
We sought for joy and found it way on wee burnie rows,
Whaur the echo mocks the corncrake amang the whinny knowes.
Ye maidens fair and pleasure dames, drive tae the banks of Doon,
You'll dearly pay for every cent tae the barbers for perfume.
But rural joy is free to a' where scented clover grows,
Whaur the echo mocks the corncrake amang the whinnie knowes.
Oh, he corncrake is noo awa', the burnie's tae the brim.
The whinny knowes are clad wi' snaw that haps the highest whin.
When gloomy winter gangs awa' and the summer it clears the sky
Oh, we'll welcome back the corncrake that bard of rural joy.