

# THE WHITEHOUSE SIFTINGS.

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## CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

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### CHRISTMAS.

When Christmas is mentioned it brings before our minds the little scene with which we are all so familiar.

"Rolling downward through the midnight,  
Comes a glorious burst of heavenly song;  
'Tis a chorus full of sweetness—  
And the singers are an angel throng.

Wond'ring shepherds see the glory,  
Hear the word the shining ones declare;  
At the manger fall in worship,  
While the music fills the quiv'ring air.

Lo! the morning star has risen,  
O'er a dark and ruined earth;  
And from out the heavenly portals,  
Is proclaimed a Saviour's birth."

If we think of Christmas as Christ day we are sure every one will have the right feeling as to how it should be spent. Many pleasures attend this festive time, but still there is a feeling of great joy throughout the world, for we know that this is the day which marks the coming of our Saviour into the world. How the little ones enjoy sending a letter to Santa Claus two or three weeks before Christmas, and hanging up their stockings by the fireplace, thinking that he will come down to fill them. The older ones, too, enjoy the exchange of presents and the hearty good cheer of Christmas time. The custom of giving slight remembrances comes from the fact that the wise men of the East brought their gifts to the place where Christ was born. In some Roman Catholic countries it is the custom to

usher in Christmas day by the celebrating of three masses—one at midnight, the second at early dawn, and the third in the morning. This dates far back to the sixth century. The day was considered in the double light of a holy commemoration and a cheerful festival, and was accordingly distinguished by devotion, by vacation from business, and by merriment. During the middle ages it was celebrated by some gay fancy spectacle of dramatic performance acted by the people dressed in singular masks and quaint costumes.

The singing of carols reminds us of the songs of old shepherds at the birth of Christ, and goes a long way back to the time when the people ceased to understand Latin. The bishops and clergy joined with the people in singing, and the songs were often made very lively by dances accompanied by the music of tambours, guitars, violins and organs. If these dances were in the night each person held in his hand a lighted wax taper.

The Protestants of Germany call Christmas the "children's festival," and on Christmas eve presents are given by means of the Christmas tree. The giving of presents is kept almost entirely within the family circle, that is, between parents and children, brothers and sisters. A large yew bough is put up in one of the parlors, lighted with tapers, and hung full with gifts, sweetmeats, apples, nuts, playthings, and ornaments. Each gift is marked with the name of the person for whom it is intended, but not with the name of the giver, and then after breakfast when the whole family is assembled, the presents are given to each one and are received with noisy glee. A more sober scene follows, for the mother now takes this occasion to say privately to the daughters, and the father to the sons, what has been observed most praiseworthy and what most faulty in their conduct for the past year. It seems almost a shame to dampen the joy of the little ones just now, when they are all so happy. In some of the smaller villages of North Germany the presents made by all the parents are sent to some one person, who, in high buskins, a white robe, a mask, and an enormous flax wig is the hugbear of children, and is known among them as "Knecht Rupert." He goes from house to house and is received by the parents with great reverence. He calls for the children, and after many questions as to their conduct, gives them each their presents.

Christmas has always been a religious, domestic, and merry-making festival in England, not only for the young, but for the old as well. The revels used to begin on Christmas eve and continue over until Candlemas (February 2nd) every day being a holiday till twelfth night (January 6th). In the houses of the nobles a "lord of misrule" or "abbot of unreason" was appointed, whose office was "to make the rarest pastimes, to delight the beholder," and whose position lasted from "All Hallow eve" (October 31st) till Candlemas day. The larder was filled with hens, turkeys, geese, ducks, beef, mutton, pork, pies, puddings, nuts, plums, sugar, and honey. The tenants were always entertained at the hall, and every art conducive to mirth was encouraged by the master. A glowing fire made of great logs, the principal of which was named the yule-log or Christmas block, which might be