

THE LESSON OF CHRISTMAS TIDE

By Dr. MacArthur, Calgary Baptist Church, New York.

The Christmas tide celebrates the birth of our Lord. The incarnation of Christ is the central thought in the history of the world. It is the event around which all other events revolve in smaller or larger circles. All the great facts of history previous to His coming had reference to His advent; all the events since look back to that advent as the beginning of a new era. All lines of previous history converge to the manger and the cross; all lines of history since diverge from these two epochal events. The birth of Christ was the beginning of a new race, and the observance of that birth is still the jubilee of the new race. Angels joined in the advent of Christ, with solo and choral songs as He left the bosom of the Father to become the child of Mary in the manger of Bethlehem.

This festival is still the most joyous feast of the church. It makes childhood more beautiful and glorious, and it lightens the burdens of age and sorrow with its tender memories and its triumphant prophecies. In the child of midwinter in northern climes it kindles a fire of hope and joy in every home and heart. It is prophetic of the golden age when Christ shall come again, when evil shall be overthrown, and when the song of a redeemed humanity shall sweep over the universe as the song of celestial choirs echoed over the plains of Bethlehem.

But, marvelous and blessed as was the incarnation of Christ, we know neither the day, the month nor the year when it took place. Dionysius the Small, about the year A. D. 525, fixed the birth of Christ in the 754th year of Rome, but all scholars know that he was in error by at least four years.

We know that Jesus was born before the death of Herod the Great; and we know that Herod died about the first of April in the year 750 of Rome. It is not too much to say that in all probability Christ was born four or five years before the date usually given; so that this present year ought to be 1909 or 1910. There is no doubt that the selection of the 25th of December as the day and the month was due to the existence of heathen festivals about that season of the year. The Christ-

she did at home. By and by it was Christmas time. It seemed a very dreary Christmas. She was all alone, and her brothers and sisters were away in the country, and all her little friends. Mother had said that she should have a very tiny Christmas tree all to herself, but that did not seem much fun. They always had such a jolly time, and when her brothers brought their friends back from school for the holidays they said it was the happiest Christmas home in the world. And so it was, for mother never mind that they could play hide-and-seek all over the house.

So the next day she set out in a four-wheeled cab, and drove a long way till they came to a great broad street; then her mother sent away the cab and they walked a little bit and turned down a very narrow one. A great many children were in the street, and they made a great deal of noise. On one of the steps was a little girl, her grimy face resting on her hand, and she looked out on the children playing as if the game did not interest her much. The children were singing in the street something about—

"If you want a nice young man, Stuff him with bread and jam." But the girl paid no heed to the song.

"She has got no doll, I am sure."

LEGEND OF THE MISTLETOE

BY VIRGINIA BELMONT.

"Balder the beautiful, God of the summer sun, Fairest of all the Gods! Light from his forehead beamed, Runes were upon his tongue, As on the warrior's sword."

All things in earth and air Round were by magic spell. Never to do him harm, Even the planets and stones. All save the Mistletoe, The sacred Mistletoe."

There are some customs which seem to survive almost indefinitely the lapse of centuries. The Mistletoe, which appears every Christmas, was a sacred plant as far back as the days of the Persians, an object of worship in Persia and India. It evokes memories of the ancient Gauls, of the sacred groves and the groves, whose priests were said to have sprung from the Magi, and all that belongs to a vanished religion.

In the days of the Druids, the festival of the cutting of the Mistletoe took place in the month of March, on the sixth day of the moon. The 10th of March at that period was New Year's Day, and as the festival required the full light of the moon, it was held as near New Year's Day as the moon would permit. The Druids claimed that the gods loved the oak above all other trees. It was the tree of Thor, the Thunderer in Scandinavian mythology, of Jupiter among the Greeks, of Perun, who is the Jove of the Slavic nations.

On the day appointed for the festival of cutting the sacred plant, a procession was formed. Two white bulls being led, were fastened by their horns to the oak. A white-robed Druid climbed the leafless branches of the tree, and with a golden sickle cut the sprays of Mistletoe. Beneath the stately oak was a circle of Druid priestesses in white robes, their hair confined by golden crescents; they held their snowy veils outspread to receive the sacred plant as they fell from the oak, for they were never permitted to touch the ground. Religious rites were then performed and the two white bulls were sacrificed. The sprays of Mistletoe were carefully preserved and used in many ways. They were placed over doors to bring good fortune, to keep off evil spirits. They were also used in various decoctions to cure many maladies, for great healing power was ascribed to the plant.

Bacon says that the Mistletoe which grew upon oaks was counted very medicinal, and the Druids considered it a remedy for every kind of poison. In some parts of Germany the children were made to stand in a circle at Christmas, knocking at doors and windows with hammers, and shouting, "Gut heil, Gut heil!" These words are plainly equivalent to the Druidical name of the Mistletoe, used by Pliny the elder, as "All heil!"

It played an important part in the life of the Gauls; a remnant of it still seems to exist in France, for the peasant boys still use the expression "An gut I can fann," as a New Year's greeting.

The custom of decorating churches and houses with evergreens is of great antiquity and was observed in many countries hundreds of years ago, just as we still see a spruce or fir tree in the East at New Year, showing that the origin of the observance is the same in each case. It was esteemed a "sacred plant" among the Normans and the Celtic bards, the harpers of Scotland and Wales held it in great reverence. Perhaps the Mistletoe was taken as a symbol of the New Year on account of its clusters of green leaves growing upon bare trees, and giving them the appearance of having renewed their foliage. In Brittany, it is called "Herbe de la Croix," because it was believed that from its wood the cross was made, and that it was degraded from a stately forest tree in consequence of this fact.

EARLIER THAN THE DRUIDS. But before we hear of the Mistletoe of the Druids, we meet with the plant in the beautiful legend of the death of Balder, from the association with which it doubtless derived its sanctity.

The Apollo, or Day god of the Norsemen, bore the name of Balder the Good. He was beloved alike of gods and men. In him the Norsemen honored all that was beautiful, eloquent, wise and good. He was the spirit of activity, joy and light. With out the brightness of his presence, Asgard, the abode of the gods, of Odin, of Thor, of Freyja, would have been sad and gloomy; without his joyous blessing earth would have been dark and barren. Great trouble, therefore, fell on the gods in Valhalla, when Balder one day informed them that he had been visited by terrific dreams,

said Nelly, in a loud whisper, to her mother. "Ask her," said the woman. "Have you got a doll, little girl?" said Nelly, in a loud whisper to her, and speaking shyly.

"No, I haven't, and that's a fact," said the child, looking up. "I was giv' one once when I went to the treat at Southend, but I giv' it to my young Polly when she went to the 'ospital. I did."

By this time a crowd of eager children had gathered round the doorstep, and Nelly was getting very shy. "Would you like a doll?" she said, and then hastily pulled out her parcel, thrust it into the child's lap and turned to go away.

"Oh, moi!" said the child as she opened the parcel. "Gawd in 'eaven 'as sent Father Christmas, an' no mistake." But Nelly was some way down the street, and the pink color was bright in her cheeks.

That night as she sat by her mother and listened to the Christmas bells, with the toys that had been sent to her ranged round her, and the little twinkling candles of the tiny Christmas tree burning out one by one, she laid her head upon her mother's lap, and said: "I don't know but what, after all, it has been the nicest Christmas. Do you remember mother," she continued, "that she said God sent the doll to her? I think I like to do God's errands."

threatening him with deadly peril. It seems that he did not possess the immortality which the Greeks attributed to their mythic divinities. Therefore the gods of Valhalla determined to use all their magic arts to preserve to themselves and to men their favorite deity. The mythology of ancient Scandinavia included a principle or power of evil called Loki, whose chief aim was to do mischief and mar the happiness of the gods. Of all the deities, Loki hated most the God of Light. Balder's mother, Freyja, resolved, at her own peril, to protect him by creating things that they would not hurt him. The goddess mother met with a ready response from earth, air, fire, water, stones, diseases, beasts, birds, insects and poisons, and from trees and flowers. One thing alone escaped her spells. There grew on the eastern side of the Valhalla an ancient oak, attached to which, rooted in its gnarled branches, she perceived a tiny plant, a soft green, insignificant thing with pearly white berries. It seemed so powerless to do harm, that she passed it by. Alas! from all ages comes the warning, that

NOTHING IS INSIGNIFICANT. After the spell had been laid on all creation not to hurt Balder, the gods went to test this immunity from harm by getting him to stand on the plains of Asgard as a target at which they hurled darts and stones, and some struck at home with swords and battle-axes. The spell worked well; Balder never hurt, and it came to be an honor paid him, when his invulnerability was thus tested.

One day the gods were assembled when Loki, hovering near unseen, gazed upon the singular spectacle. He beheld the bright-haired Balder standing in a circle formed by the deities of Valhalla. Odin stood raving at the sport, while Thor, with his mighty hammer at his side, struck at home with swords and battle-axes. The spell worked well; Balder never hurt, and it came to be an honor paid him, when his invulnerability was thus tested.

ONE LITTLE SHRUB. "All things," replied Freyja, "except one little shrub that grows upon an oak in the eastern side of Valhalla, and is called the mistletoe. I thought it too young and too feeble to crave an oath from me."

A secret joy thrilled through the false maiden as she heard these words, and, hastening from the mistletoe as soon as she could, she flew to the spot where grew the fatal parasite. Then, resuming his proper shape, Loki cut off the mistletoe and hastened back to the plains of Asgard. He found the gods still at their singular amusement. The blind god Hodur, the god of brute strength, was standing alone to one side. In the Norse mythology he signified Night, as Balder signified Day.

Wiv' dest thou not throw something at Balder, Freyja's darling, who is called the mistletoe. I thought it too young and too feeble to crave an oath from me."

DEATH OF THE DAY GOD. Only Odin, the Allfather, will remain and gather around him on the plains where Asgard once stood the gods reigned and purified by fire, and when Balder will come again with his unconquered valor, and all evil will be done, and light and darkness will dwell together in unity.

After eternal purification by suffering and fire, and the regeneration to which the Northern looked as the means of the ultimate adjustment of good and evil, and from which they did not exempt even their gods, the influence of good was to prevail. Balder would reappear, radiant, beautiful, joyous as before, and Loki, the spirit of evil, be no more heard of.

An Envious Woman. The train had pulled out of the terminal and the conductor was on his fare-collecting tour. In one car there sat a lone woman dressed in deep mourning. When the conductor approached her, the woman burst into tears.

The conductor asked her what was the matter. She sobbed this reply: "Ten years ago I took my first husband over this road to be cremated; and he was killed by a train."

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An Appeal for English.

In the Boston subway signs marked "Exit" have lately been taken down, to be replaced with others upon which the Saxon word "Out" is plainly inscribed. A Boston paper remarks that it has evidently been discovered that not all the people in that cradle city understand Latin. We should say, however, that the substitution indicates a growth in the public intelligence, and a decline in their exit, rather than a place at which they may go out. We believe that the sensible practice of marking women's waiting rooms at railroad stations "Women," instead of "Ladies," and the men's similar apartments "Men," instead of "Gentlemen," originated with a Boston railroad.

In the process of the purification of the English language, as used in America, from unnecessary and intrusive foreign elements, it is quite possible that the abounding foreign population of our great cities is exercising a certain helpful influence. Why? Because the foreigner who is required to learn English, sure doubtless feels it an imposition that he should be made to learn another language, and begins to talk at too much Latin and French. As an example, it is a fact that the Latin races themselves no longer used the word "exit" as we in our affection of Latin employ it, but use their own native phrases, as we would ours. If we were wise, even the Frenchman or the Italian must learn the meaning of the word "exit" in addition to the word "out." As to the Slav, the German or the Scandinavian, he must be continually exasperated by the necessity of learning an English form of speech for ordinary use, and another for public places, books and official proceedings.

Intended to command the crowd, should be in the very plainest possible language. But it is not the practice in this country to put it in such language. In the park we find such signs as this: "The public is requested to refrain from the use of the receptacle provided." What Russian, Hungarian, Swede, Finn or Syrian could possibly make out the meaning of that? If the authorities had shown more sense and made the placard read "Put rubbish

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in the tub," its admonition might occasionally be heeded. We need to be more English and less Latin—more sensible and less sophomoric.—New York Mail.

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