

At the time of the Nativity the world was buried in idolatry, and quite naturally the first Christians, in their joy, associated many heathen customs with their great feast. They retained those emblems of gladness that were so prevalent in the feasts of their forefathers. The vine was looked on by the ancients as a symbol of good fortune, and they had a special feast in its honour—the vintage feast. The holly, with its profusion of berries, and the mistletoe came in for special veneration, the reason for which we know not. And even today, when the world sneers at the superstitious ideas of former days, many of those practices, the purest and most soul-touching of our heathen ancestors, are to be found in the Christmas celebrations of all creeds, classes and nations.

The religious services about this season are extremely tender and inspiring. The beautiful story of the origin of our faith and the scenes that accompanied its announcement receive the greatest attention. Is there anything grander or more edifying than the midnight mass? And as Rome is the centre of Christendom, it is there, also, in the greatest edifice attributed to the genius of man, that the most elevating spectacle is to be held. The atheist lives in the eternal city all the year round, mocking, slandering and belieing the word of God, but when the lofty chime begins to toll on Christmas morning he, too, with the long concourse of pious worshippers, wends his way to the majestic St. Peter's, and assists in the greatest act of all, whether led thither by curiosity or by the rumblings of a dissatisfied conscience.

Every country where the standard of Christ has found its way has its countless legends of Christmastide, but time and international intercourse has so intermingled them that it is hard to trace them to the one from which they first emanated. Thus we find the Yule-log, the material for the great Christmas fire, in vogue in most-ly all, althou^g it is pretty sure the custom originated among the Saxons and other northern nations, who used it in their feasts as a mark of respect to one of their gods. Ghost stories have been prevalent in all places and at all times, and, indeed, Christmas would be incomplete without them. At no other period of the year is such vent given to those tales of the true blood-curdling type that not only beset the feelings of the younger generation, but cause a sensation in the minds of the older. In Ireland and Scotland prevails the usage of a Christmas candle, which is burned all