

THAT DIVINE BIRTHDAY.

Beautiful colors of pink and blue,
Beautiful patterns of every device;
The richest to charm and the rich to entice—
All interwoven in Fancy's bright loom,
With figures in nimbus and flow'rs in bloom.

Beautiful weavings by fairy-like fingers,
Beautiful views where everyone lingers;
Beautiful scintillations of reason and soul,
Beautiful truth coming out of the veil.
In value more precious at such hallowed times
Than any gold nugget direct from the mine.

Beautiful handwork for rich and for poor,
Beautiful memories long to endure;
Beautiful patience, in spite of delays,
To keep us alert on the dear Christmas days.
The one from the magical touches of art,
And all from the golden shrines of the heart.

Beautiful promptings, vanishing never;
Beautiful thoughts to warm each endeavor;
Beautiful acts, each neighbor possessing,
Coincided from the heart and wrought into blessing.
Out of this stronghold of "happy forever,"
Forged are the love-chains nothing can sever.

Beautiful signs of our dear Christmas-tide,
Beautiful signs now float far and wide,
Announcing that birthday, so holy and dear,
The happiest day in the Christian year;
Then the glow of the heart is aroused from afar,
Born of that glorious Eastern star.

Beautiful deeds of the brave Christian soul,
Marking Time's cycles as gently they roll;
Beautiful visions of angels on high,
Beautiful anthems from out the blue sky,
Chanting forever and keeping the trust
Of Bethlehem's God-child—the Lord and the Christ!

A Queer Story.

SOMETHING thrilling!"
"And, if possible, true."
"If it can be accounted for scientifically, so much the better."
"I am sorry to say," said the individual to whom these remarks were addressed—"I am sorry to say that, if the last clause is a condition of my telling a strange story, I must decline. I can give you a true story, so far as my senses have not deceived me, but account for it scientifically, I cannot."

The little party, seated round a glowing wood fire on last 31st December, were visibly impressed by the foregoing speech. Mrs. Mildmay, the young hostess, looked at her two unmarried sisters meaningly, and her husband bent to hide a smile. They had often talked over Martyn's peculiar fancies, but they had never heard from him anything definite concerning them, and they did not wish to spoil the opportunity of hearing his confession of weakness.

The girls were enchanted! This sober, thoughtful-looking man might well throw a shade of truth over the most improbable story, they imagined; and Ethel, the youngest, said:

"Oh! please, Mr. Martyn, don't keep us in suspense too long. I am sure you can tell a lovely ghost story, if you like; and it is just the 'witchin' hour,' you know—Old Year's night."

"Yes," he responded calmly, "it is a good time for my story, because it culminated on Old Year's night; but—"

"Fire away!" broke in Mildmay's youngest brother, who was home from Eton, and only kept in order by Mrs. Mildmay's pretty sisters. And Martyn did not finish his broken sentence, but began again.

"You remarked once, Mrs. Mildmay, upon my horror of bats. Do you remember I told you that I had good reason to dread them, having once been haunted by one, and you laughed considerably at the idea? Perhaps I shall only make you laugh now by telling you more particulars; but I can assure you, at the time when what I am going to relate happened, the matter was no subject for a joke to me.

"Not so very many years ago—when you were all babies—I was a young man with expectations. I was brought up by my uncle who had made a tolerable fortune in leather, and it was an understood thing that I should be his heir. He sent me to a good school, and would have given me the advantages of a University education, but that I preferred knocking about the Continent with him, and he liked to have my society. My elder brother, Arnold, who, as you know, has made a distinguished name for himself in mathematics, often laughingly declared that not for mountains of pure gold would he have changed places with me, to be tied to an old man's whims as I was. But the yoke lay easily upon me, because I was really attached to my queer old uncle. He had ever been indulgent to me, and we had many tastes in common.

"You may imagine, then, how great a shock I sustained one day, when staying with my brother at Cambridge, to receive a telegram saying—

"Come at once—your uncle—paralytic stroke—great danger."

"Dear old fellow! When I reached him some hours later he was gone too far to do more than recognize me, and sank in twenty-four hours, propped up in my arms. I shall never forget those last painful hours, during which he seemed to be trying vainly to make me understand something, for he was quite speechless, and only illuminated by fitful flashes of consciousness. It is needless to dwell upon my feelings, however; I can only say that I had a very real loss to mourn in the death of my dear old guardian, and after the last offices were concluded I hastened to my room to struggle with my grief in solitude."

"I sat for a long time, all that chill December afternoon, till the shadows began to fall and the twilight change for starlight. I am not troubled with nerves, as you know, Mildmay, but it was with a start I heard a curious little sound become audible in my room. It was as if something moved the window curtains and set the brass rings shaking against each other at first; then there were soft thuds against the wall and a faint cry, like the sound of a child in the distance. I sprang to my feet, after first holding my breath to listen, bent on discovering the source of the strange noise, but I could see nothing at all. The room was very dark in the corners, and there was something eerie in the mysterious presence of something, yet invisible, in a house visited by the grisly phantom Death."

"I lighted a candle and lifted it to a level with my eyes, gazing anxiously around for the cause of my disturbance. In a second the light was blown out by a quick flutter of wings, and the candlestick fell from my grasp on the floor with a clatter. 'A wretched bird,' I exclaimed aloud, in disgust at being thus startled, and ashamed of my first superstitious

feeling. I hastened to light the candle again, and presently I discovered hanging to my bed-curtains just out of reach—what? Nothing in the least degree supernatural, but a good-sized bat—an ordinary dark-brown 'fitter-mouse,' such as one often encounters in shady spots on warm summer evenings, when they knock against one's head with quaint little screeches."

Here there was a cry all round. What? A bat in December! Who ever heard of such a thing? Scorn was visible on the faces of the listeners, which till now had been eager with interest. Martyn continued:

"I am not accounting for anything. I never saw a bat at large in England at that time of the year before, certainly; but it was a bat, undoubtedly; there was no mistaking the creature."

"I had some trouble to dislodge it, and, having done so, to my chagrin it flitted wildly about the room for a few minutes, beating against the walls, looking-glasses, and various other articles of furniture in its flight, then suddenly disappeared, and there was dead silence as before."

"For fully half an hour I hunted for that bat in vain, and then my uncle's old butler, Jenkins, came to tell me dinner was ready; so asking him to open my windows, as there was a bat in the room (at which he started somewhat), I went down to my lonely repast full of sad thoughts, not unmixed with irritation at my ineffectual attempt to catch my strange visitor."

"The hours went very slowly. I wrote one or two letters conveying the sad news of my uncle's death, and took a stroll, but soon came back, unable to bear my own company. The best way to pass the time was, I thought, to seek oblivion in sleep, and this I concluded to do at an early hour."

"The window blind was flapping as I entered my room, the window itself was

invited me to go home and stay with him until after the funeral. To which kind offer I readily assented."

"He gave me a glass of something warm after dinner, enlivened with some cheerful anecdotes, put me in a comfortable room with a fire, and I slept like a top."

"Judge of my amazement, and indeed the amazement of every one, when, after the funeral, it was found that there was no will, and that my uncle, instead of leaving me his heir, had left me penniless, all his estate going to the elder brother by right of primogeniture. The lawyers were puzzled. A great many years had elapsed, they said, since they had seen the will; and it never had been in their possession, as my uncle always kept it himself, looked up among his valuable papers. Now all his desks and drawers had been unlocked, and it was not to be found, although every unlikely spot had been ransacked."

"There was a suspicion, accepted by some of the relations as believable, that in burning some old papers some months before his death my uncle had destroyed his will by mistake. But this did not satisfy me. I knew the dear old man too well to believe that he would commit such an error; he was far too methodical and businesslike. Yet I had no reason to suspect foul play. The whole affair was a mystery of mysteries, which seemed unlikely ever to be solved. There was nothing for me to do but bear my misfortune calmly, and I knew Arnold would deal generously by me. He had never harbored any jealousy against me, or envied my position as uncle's heir, being of 'purer fire' than a great many men who make wealth their sole ambition."

"Still, my position was rather a hard one. I had lived, the life of a country gentleman at ease hitherto, doing much as I liked, and always having plenty of money to spend. Now I felt the shame

I smiled, and tried to suppress a slight shudder. That room!

"After passing a very pleasant evening, I slept well, and so I did for several succeeding nights. My old apparition did not visit me; I began to rally myself on my fears, and soon persuaded myself that I had been grossly deceived by my own imagination."

"Until Old Year's night.
"It must have been past twelve o'clock, and I had been asleep some time, when I seemed to awake with the old terrible sensation of something loathsome gripping my hair. In a moment I was bathed in cold dew, and shivering like a man plunged into a valley mist without a coat. I sprang up and tore the thing from my hair. It fluttered from me and disappeared as usual with a faint cry more like a dying child in the distance than ever."

"My fire was out, but the room was quite light from the frosted moon which shone through the curtains of the window. I noted how sepulchral everything looked in the ghastly pale twilight, which threw the shadow of my looking-glass in a long dark patch on the floor, and made the queer old furniture stand out in grim blackness. And the room was full of a mist that seemed to gather closer and closer until I could scarcely see the huge oak wardrobe that stood in the recess by the fireplace. Thicker and thicker it grew until it was like heavy smoke or steam, clouding all view, and, had it not been for the awful stillness and deadly coldness, I should have thought the house was on fire. With my eyes stretched to their widest I sat up, upright, breathless with expectation, for something was to happen—something was happening!"

The fog cleared away at the corners of the room, and filled only the centre, densely, like an uprising column of vapour; it shrank and dwindled until

a step-ladder, on account of the abnormal height of the cornice.

"Meaning looks were passed round."

"Do you generally keep your boots on the top of wardrobes twelve feet high, Mr. Martyn?" asked one laughing girl.

"I said I thought it a very safe place, and could highly recommend it for keeping things out of the way."

"A flood of rapid banter followed, which was broken by the sudden entrance of Arnold's man, whose white face and very excited manner commanded general attention."

"Mr. Martyn, sir—we've found something on the top of the wardrobe; you'd better come and look, sir; he got no farther, and without hesitation the whole party started up and followed Arnold to my room, where stood old Jenkins by the step-ladder at the foot of the wardrobe, very red in the face, and holding in his hands a bundle of dusty documents."

"Your uncle's will, of course," said Mildmay, as his friend paused. "Is this really true, Martyn, or only a good story for Christmas time?"

"It was my uncle's will sure enough, and it was found side by side with my boot behind the cornice. The rest you are not obliged to believe. I should not had I not seen and felt."

"And did your uncle leave his property to you?" inquired one of the girls.

"Most of it."

"Rather rough on your brother," remarked the Etonian.

"And what about the bat?" asked Mrs. Mildmay; "did you find it?"

"A dead bat certainly was found in a corner of the chimney next time it was swept, but I never saw or felt the thing again. Perhaps you can understand now why it is I dislike bats so much."

"I should have thought you'd be jolly fond of 'em," said the irrepressible Etonian, sotto voce.—M. L. Pendered in Boys Own Paper.

LEGENDS OF THE MISTLETOE

In England and France, the Christmas festivities are made beautiful by the lavish decorations of various evergreens. Desolate must be the hearthstone that has not its branch of the much-loved, time-honored mistletoe with clusters of pearls set in dark, thick lusterless leaves, or of holly hung with berries of vivid scarlet mid its polished leaves.

Like the splendor of heaven's sunlight, these leaves, storied with romance and history, are heirlooms alike to the hearts of prince and peasant, making bright and beautiful the humble roof-tree and gleaming amid the banners, shields and trophies of long ago, in the great baronial halls that centuries have aged. In our own continent, America, the favored, it is a wayward child of old England, at this holy festival binds her brow with her own beautiful greens twined with those worn by her honored mother.

Apart from its waxy beauty, the mistletoe is dear to our hearts from childhood's associations that hang around the legendary ballad, "The Mistletoe Bough," sung on Christmas Eves of Lang Syne.

Many legends, poetic and mythical, have made classic this beautiful parasite. It was regarded as sacred by the Druids, who, on one of their festivals of the full-moon, sought for a growth of it on an oak-tree, a tree also held sacred by this ancient order. It was then, as now, rarely found growing upon an oak, but when its beautiful berries glistened upon this tree, was esteemed possessed of mysterious virtues, and its discovery celebrated with festivities and solemn religious ceremonies.

The turf beneath the sacred, widespread branches became at once the site of sacrificial rites and feasting. A large space was incircled by stones of enormous size. The cromlech, or altar, formed of one immense stone raised upon other stones on end, occupied the center of the space. Two young milk-white bulls, tethered for the first time, were bound by the horns to the sacred oak. The arch-Druid, in priestly vestments, ascended the tree, and with a golden sickle severed the mystic mistletoe, which was caught in the snowy robes of his acolytes. The victims were slain amid rejoicings and prayers to their deity that the gift might be propitious to those upon whom he had bestowed it.

An infusion of the precious leaves in water was regarded by them as an antidote to all poisons and a cure for all diseases. The plant, according to Pliny, was called by them a name which, in their language, signified "heal all." Its wonderful twigs suspended in front of their huts exempted the fortunate owners from the frowns of the sylvan deities and from the wrath of the elements.

A charm against all bad and evil,
A spell to keep away the devil."

The Scandinavian legends warn us that the mistletoe has fatal properties to all who touch the sap in plucking its branches. Far away in the North, upon a lonely mountain-top, there dwelt a few peasant families. An inmate of one of the lowly dwellings was a young girl, lovely, loving, beloved by and betrothed to her next neighbor, a sturdy peasant lad. The young girl fell sick. To restore her to health her lover sought near and far for the precious mistletoe growing upon an oak. At length his search was rewarded. Upon a snow-clad oak the coveted branches hung in generous profusion. With eager, reckless haste, forgetful of his own danger, he climbed the oak, seized the life-giving or death-dealing plant as handled, and fell lifeless to the ground.

The mythology of the North unfolds to us the fatal power of the mistletoe in the charming myth of Baldur, the young god of oratory and of poetry.

Baldur the Good was the favorite son of Odin, and beloved of all the gods especially for his marvellous beauty and courage. From a succession of terrible dreams he believed himself doomed to death, and related the hideous vision to the assembled gods, who with one accord determined to avert from him all danger, and to this end conjured all things, Frigga, his mother, exacted from the elements and from all things in nature, animate and inanimate, a vow under no circumstances to do him harm.

Thus protected, Baldur, as of yore, led the chase and courted danger in protean form, giving himself as a target for the other gods' arrows, battle-axes and other weapons, who, believing that do what they would they could do him no hurt, thus sported with his valor, deeming it an honor paid to Baldur.

Loki, the detractor of the gods and the author of all their misfortunes, angered that no harm could befall Baldur, and filled with envy and jealousy at the tribute thus paid to him by the other gods, resorted to strategy to find some way to work him evil. Assuming the disguise of a woman, he sought the abode of Frigga, who questioned her if she knew how the gods were employed. She replied to the question and to the passionate love and pride of the mother for her darling, gifted son, that they were testing their skill and the merits of their weapons upon Baldur, who was unsathed by them.

"Ay, ay," Frigga made answer, "nought can hurt Baldur. I have exacted an oath from all things, to do him no harm."

"What!" exclaimed the deceiver, "have all things really sworn to spare Baldur?"

"All things," returned Frigga, "except an insignificant plant that grows near Walhalla, called 'mistletoe,' anything so weak could do him no harm."

Hastily Loki left the presence of Frigga, and, resuming his own shape, searched for and found the frail plant. Appearing amidst the gods with a branch of mistletoe, he directed it with aim so sure that Baldur was pierced through the heart and expired instantly.

A legend of the crucifixion, full of pathos and beauty, tells the origin of the mistletoe in its concluding words as follows:

"Ever since that day, the tree from which the cross was hewn has never been suffered to grow as a tree, but only exists as a parasite on other trees.
"It is neither fruit nor flower, but bears clusters of waxy white berries, and saps the life of any tree to which it attaches itself. It is called 'the mistletoe.'—Olive Cheney.



CHILDREN'S HAPPY EVENINGS.

wide open, and as there was nothing to be seen I concluded the bat had made its way back to its proper quarters."

"Dreadfully I got between the sheets, after extinguishing my candle, and sank into an unrestful kind of doze, teased by unpleasant thoughts and sorrowful memories. Suddenly I was awakened sharply and in full senses by feeling something give a tight grip of my hair. The room was in perfect silence. I sprang up wildly and dashed my hand to my head. It touched something there. Horrors! The bat!"

"I shook all over with irritation, and the creepy feeling that comes over one when anything unexpected rouses one from sleep with a touch. The thought of the uncanny thing clinging to my hair was most distasteful. I hastened to light my candle, and again, this time in night-shirt and slippers, prowled about the room in search of the intruder."

"All in vain. I heard a few flutters, but saw nothing at all, although I must have been standing about in the cold for upwards of an hour. Shivering and muttering under my breath, I got into bed again at last, and this time fell into a sound sleep of utter exhaustion, from which I was not awakened until the man brought my hot water in the morning."

"Next day I asked Jenkins to look for the bat in my room. He stared at me as if he thought I exhibited signs of incipient madness, and said 'Yes sir.' But of course I knew he was too sane a person, in his own estimation, to look for bats in bedrooms in December!"

"The following night the same thing occurred. I could not sleep at all for fancying I felt the horrid clutches of the thing in my hair, even when it was not really there."

"You may smile, but can have no idea what a ghastly sensation it is. The skin of my head feels tight when I think of it. And I was more successful than I had been the night before in tracing the bat to its lair."

"That day the doctor called. He looked at me critically."

"Dear me!" he said, "you don't look over healthy yourself. Have you been sleeping well?"

"I confessed that I had not."

"He remarked that no doubt it was rather lonely for me in that house, with no society but the dead, so to speak, and

of never having fairly earned my living, and I did not know what to turn to, as I could not live on Arnold's property."

"He evidently considered it a brilliant idea to instal me in my old home as steward of the estate, and I could not but accept the post gratefully, although, I must confess, with some shrinking, as I had begun to dread the Grange, with its painful associations of death, horror, and disappointment."

"A month or two after the funeral I went to my brother and told him, very reluctantly, that I could no longer stay at the place—he must find some one to take my post. I think he was rather frightened at my appearance, which was ghastly; for, although I did not say so, he knew, knowing he would chaff me sceptically, those few weeks had been more than my usually strong nerves could bear. That I had been haunted—yes, haunted day and night by that spectral bat, flitting before my eyes in the dusk, clinging to my hair in the darkness—was a fact real enough to reduce me to the shadow of my former self, but likely to meet with unlimited scorn from outsiders as a pure fable or hallucination. And, indeed, I had ceased to make mention of it to any one. No one saw it but myself, and why should any one credit my story? I would not have believed such a tale on my evidence but that of my own senses."

"I managed to obtain a situation as steward to a friend of my brother's, who had a large estate in Sussex, and for a year worked in tolerable content, feeling the bondage a little hard after my recent liberty, but free from supernatural visitations, and gifted with renewed health."

"Then came the strangest part of the whole affair.
"In December, Arnold, who had been staying at the Grange for some weeks with his wife (a young bride of a few months), asked me to spend Christmas there with them, and I, with a fading memory of old terrors, accepted at once, arriving at the house on Christmas Eve. It was full of visitors, and scarcely seemed like the same place which I had left so gruesome and dismal. Fires were in every room, holly and mistletoe hung from the walls and ceilings, merry voices and laughter echoed through the passages."

"I have given you your own room, old fellow," said Arnold, with kindly intention.

but the size of a man, and then—it took form! It is quite as impossible to describe what I saw in any language that will convey a picture of it, as it is to account for it, except on the supposition that it was all a simple night-mare. A grey long figure, little shaped, but in outline sufficient to suggest a man; filmy, dim drapery clinging to the dark looking-glass shadow on the floor, and the glimmer of eyes gazing at me from where the head should be."

"Such eyes! They seemed familiar to me, and in a flash I comprehended. They were the eyes of my dead uncle—dead a year, yet still living eyes, wearing a mournful look of sad reproach in their burning depths. In a moment I recognised the spectre, the thin face and drawn lips appeared for an instant; then there was a soft rushing sigh all around me—I fancied the curtains of my bed moved as in a slight breeze—the moonlight fell clear through the room as before, and I found I could speak."

"What is it—what is it—what do you want?" I gasped incoherently, springing out of bed, for I was certainly awake now. But all was still as death, and I could hear my own breath labouring to pass my dry throat. A streak of silver light from a mirror on the wall was reflected upon the top of the oak wardrobe, and there I saw distinctly, perched upon the carving that decorated the cornice—the bat. With a sudden return to life and overwhelming rage, I seized a boot that lay my feet and hurled it with all my might at the creature. The missile fell with a crash behind the cornice, and in five minutes Arnold, with half the household at his back, appeared at my door demanding an explanation of the alarming noise."

"I felt very sore and humiliated when I glanced at the assembled company the next morning, for I could see all the faces trying to hide a smile, and when I entered, of mingled contempt and pity—if nothing more antagonistic—for the dreamer of night-mares who had roused them from their slumbers by throwing heavy boots about in the dead of night! Nothing was said, however, until a walk proposed, and I asked Arnold whether he would tell Jenkins to search for my boot at the top of the wardrobe, suggesting at the same time the necessity of employing

A FAIRY TALE.

It is the 25th of December.

Dick Harduppe tries to look jolly, but his "Merry Christmas," has a hollow sound, and his anxious face looks more worn than ever, as he gives his wife the gold bracelet which he has pinched himself six months to buy.

Her bright looks and happy smile grate upon him, somehow, and he really feels relieved when she doesn't hand him a present in return, for he's been wondering how he could pay for it and, also buy the winter's coal.

He is growing almost cheerful when a slip of paper, familiar in shape and color, catches his eye by his plate.

He defers looking at it as long as possible, and thinks a little hardly of Milly for not having kept it till next day.

At last he glances at it, and with an inarticulate word, falls from his chair in a dead faint.

It is a receipted bill, for coal enough to last them the whole winter.

But joy is seldom "the fell destroyer," and he is soon revived.

Milly's bright eyes have a hint of tears in them, as she tells how she earned the money by a long siege of scribbling at stories, poems and jokes, on the ever fruitful if somewhat-frayed-at-the-edges topic of bills coming in on Jan. 1 for the husband's Christmas present.

Who says now that it doesn't pay to tell the truth—sometimes?—AUGUSTINE ANDERSON.

Christmas Weather Proverbs.

A warm Christmas, a cold Easter. A light Christmas, a heavy sheaf. A green Christmas makes a fat graveyard. A wind on Christmas Day, trees will bring much fruit. If Christmas finds a bridge, he'll break it; if he finds none, he'll make one. If ice will bear a man before Christmas, it will not bear a man afterward. The shepherd would rather see his wife enter the stable on Christmas Day than the sun. If the sun shines through the apple-tree on Christmas Day, there will be an abundant crop the following year.

The Curious Nag.

A curious nag of New Guinea Was aged and spavined and skinny He'd go for a mile, Then turn round and smile, And once in a while he would whinny.