

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

THE WREATHERS.

I.

'Tis Christmas! the old church tower
Is draped in drifted snow;
The broad-faced clock chimes out the hour
With solemn voice and slow:
Glistening and white the ivy leaves
Which wrap the ancient wall;
Iceicles hang from the mossy eaves,
And the frost its silver foliage weaves
On panes where the sunbeams fall.

II.

By the gray old porch is a band
Of old and young and fair,
And a wide-wheeled wagon brought to a stand,
With its goodly burden there:
These are the wreathers come away
A mile o'er the frozen sod,
To deck with holly, and laurel, and bay,
On the whole year's best and brightest day,
The hallowed courts of God.

III.

Thank God! our nation's faith
Is not a thing of to-day;
Our sleeping sires were true to the death,
And we would be as they:
We deck the shrines which they arrayed—
We sing the strains they loved;
We pray the very prayers they prayed,
By the sacred spots where their bones are laid,
In the courts in which they moved.

IV.

Merrily, merrily now they twine
The bands of glistening green,
Whilst here and there the berries shine,
Blood-red and white between;
Up and down the dim old aisles,
Pulpit, pillar, and wall,
Never, I ween, in its palmiest day,
Had that hoar old church been drest more gay:
They wreathed them one and all.

V.

Brightest 'mid that bright band
Whose busy fingers ply,
A group of three little wreathers stand
Labouring earnestly.
She with the dark and flowing hair,
She with the laughing eyes,
She with the golden ringlets, where,
Nestling still, and soft, and fair,
A sunlight ever lies.

VI.

Whilst you are busy here,
Fair little wreathers three,
With light and shade in another sphere
Is wreathing your destiny:
You may call it an idle dream—
A vision—or what you will,
A glimpse of your future life I seem
To catch by the aid of this loitering beam
From this moulded window-sill.

VII.

She with the sunny hair,
And pale and dreamy brow,
Shall deck no more with fillets fair
A mouldering fane below;
Away, away in the spirit-land,
'Ere another Christmas shines,
I see her one of the sainted band,
With fadless palm in deathless hand,
In Heaven's holier shrines.

VIII.

She with the laughing eyes,
The sweet and ringing voice,
Bidding, like song from summer skies,
Earth's wearied ones rejoice;
I see—I see the bright eyes dim—
Dim with the weeping tears,
Yet full of the Heaven-born joy which springs
From the depths of earthly sorrowings,
In the gloom of after years.

IX.

She with the darksome locks,
And calm and earnest gaze,
With a faith unmoved by a thousand shocks,
Looks back on those bright days;
She gave to her God her green young life
With its wealth of yearning love;
Now, a grey-haired woman—a widowed wife,
Weary and worn with the lengthened strife,
He cheers her from above.

X.

Wreath on in faith and love!
'Tis not for you to know
What fate is wreathing for you above
Whilst you wreath on below;
But the daily deeds your hands may do,
The paths your feet have trod,
May gloom or glory bring to you
Above or 'neath the sod:
Here, in life's fair but chequered scene,
See that each heart be drest and green,
A temple meet for God.

THE SAXON WASSAIL.

Everybody knows that the troubled history of the ancient British kingdom, which was revived in England for some time after the withdrawal of the Roman dominion, has afforded subjects for many of those legends of romantic chivalry which the modern poet or painter chooses for artistic illustration. The reign of King or Prince Arthur, in the early part of the sixth century, when all the west of England, including the plains and downs of Wiltshire, together with South Wales, was ruled and defended, it is said, by a Celtic hero of that name, has engaged the attention of more than one great English poet; and Tennyson has, in part at least, composed the epic which Milton once designed. The spread of the Saxon conquest, which did not extend to Wessex till after the death of Prince Arthur, was attended likewise in other parts of the island with some incidents of great dramatic and picturesque interest, which have always kept a strong hold on the imagination of the English people. These stories are vividly related by the monkish chroniclers, who seem the more inclined to dwell pathetically on the decline and fall of the British independent sovereignty, because the Britons of that age, as well as the Irish and the Celtic nations of Gaul, were devout adherents of the orthodox Church, while the Saxons, till the mission of St. Augustine, a hundred years later, were obstinately opposed to Christian teaching and worship. This motive is curiously shown in the biography of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, which was the groundwork, apparently, of some passages in Nennius's "History of the Britons," narrating the events of the reign of Vortigern, or Guorthigern, at whose court St. Germanus resided in the middle of the fifth century. The treacherous and rapacious

behaviour of Hengist and Horsa, after their landing and settlement in the Isle of Thanet (in the neighbourhood of Ramsgate and Margate), is here displayed; with the credulous folly of the British Monarch in granting to Hengist the whole province of Ceintland, or Kent, from which the Saxons afterwards proceeded to make themselves masters of the other home counties. The story is again told, with some amplifications, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, a much more modern author, who only compiled, however, the statement of the ancient, probably British, ecclesiastical writers. From his narrative, therefore, we shall quote the characteristic anecdote which has been chosen by the artist, Mr. James Godwin, for the subject of one of our illustrations in this Christmas number. This scene, our readers will observe, is described as having taken place about the year 450, in the house of the Saxon chieftain Hengist, then residing not in the Isle of Thanet, but at Caistor, in Lincolnshire. For Hengist, as the ally of King Vortigern, had led the Saxon warriors northward to fight against the savage Picts beyond the Humber; and Vortigern had rewarded him already with large estates in a district called Lindsey, and with a castle which was named in the British language Kaer-correi, and in the Saxon was called Thancaistre; there being a silly old legend, borrowed from that of the founding of Carthage, of the grant of as much land for its site as might be covered with a bull's hide, which, having been cut into a *thong* of leather, inclosed a considerable circuit. With this preface, remarking that Vortigern had just agreed with his friend Hengist to send for some fresh Saxon reinforcements, we may leave Geoffrey of Monmouth to tell the tale:—

"In the meantime, the messenger returned from Germany with eighteen ships full of the best soldiers that they could get. They also brought along with them Rowena, the daughter of Hengist, one of the most accomplished beauties of that age. After their arrival, Hengist invited the King to his home, to view his new buildings and the new soldiers that were come over. The King readily accepted his invitation, but privately, and, having highly commended the magnificence of the building, enlisted the men into his service. Here he was entertained at a Royal banquet; and, when that was over, the young lady came out of her chamber, bearing a golden cup full of wine, with which she approached the King, and, making a low curtsy, said to him, 'Lauded King, waes heil!' The King, at the sight of the lady's face, was, on a sudden, both surprised and inflamed with her beauty; and, calling to his interpreter, asked him what she said, and what answer he should make her. 'She called you "Lord King," said the interpreter, 'and offered to drink your health. Your answer to her must be, "Drink heil!"' Vortigern accordingly answered, 'Drink heil!' and bade her drink; after which he took the cup from her hand, kissed her, and drank himself. From that time to this it has been the custom in Britain that he who drinks to anyone says, 'Waes heil!' and he that pledges him answers, 'Drink heil!' Vortigern being now drunk with the variety of liquors, the devil took this opportunity to enter into his heart and to make him in love with the damsel, so that he became suitor to her father for her. It was, I say, by the devil's entering into his heart that he, who was a Christian, should fall in love with a Pagan. By this example, Hengist, being a prudent man, discovered the King's levity, and consulted with his brother Horsa and the other ancient men present, what to do in relation to the King's request. They unanimously advised him to give him his daughter, and, in consideration of her, to demand the Province of Kent. Accordingly, the daughter was, without delay, delivered to Vortigern, and the Province of Kent to Hengist, without the knowledge of Gorangan, who had the government of it. The King the same night married the Pagan lady, and became extremely delighted with her, by which he quickly brought upon himself the hatred of the nobility and of his own sons."

The subsequent misfortunes of the soft-hearted British monarch, who would neither obey the counsel of Bishop Germanus to expel the heathen Saxons and to form a defensive league with the Christians of Gaul, nor would follow the spirited example of his own son Vortimer, in resisting the progress of the foreign invaders, need only just be touched upon here. There was another feast to which this infatuated Vortigern was invited, with three hundred of his nobles, in the palace of Hengist, not many years after his marriage with the fair-haired Lady Rowena. It was the Saxon custom (as may be observed in our illustration of the Wassail scene) for the guests at a banquet to leave their weapons in the hall outside. Vortigern and the other Britons, in dining with Hengist, conformed, of course, to this rule. But the treacherous host, says Nennius, "had ordered three hundred Saxons to conceal each a knife under his foot, and to mix with the Britons, so that each man of the latter should sit next his enemy; and after they had eaten and drank, and were much intoxicated, Hengist suddenly cried out 'Nimed eue Saxes!' and instantly his followers drew their knives, and rushing upon the Britons, each slew him that sat next him; and there were slain three hundred of the nobles of Vortigern. The King, being captive, purchased his redemption by delivering up the three Provinces of Essex, Sussex, and Middlesex, besides other districts, at the option of his betrayers."

It remains to be added that St. Germanus, since the brave Prince Vortimer had died some time before, took upon himself a sort of dictatorship of the British realm, and fought against Hengist with considerable success; while the unhappy Vortigern, with Rowena, his fatal Saxon bride, retreated to a castle on the river Towey, and shut himself up there, attended by some courtiers and by the clergy, praying night and day for the pardon of his sins. "But on the third night, at the third hour, fire fell from heaven and burnt up the castle; and Vortigern and the daughter of Hengist, and his other wives, and all the inhabitants, both men and women, miserably perished. Such was the end of this unhappy King."

THE PRIVATE VIEW.

When the managers of theatres and other places of entertainment have got ready, with infinite cost and pains, the most popular exhibitions of the season, it is their custom, we believe, in some cases, to bid a few not unfriendly critics to come and inspect "the properties," look at the effective pieces of scenery, and in due time to witness the rehearsal. A privilege which is so flattering to the judgment, and which appeals so directly to the candour of the persons invited, who are enabled in this way to procure the earliest and most ex-

clusive knowledge of those matters, always eagerly and curiously discussed by a portion of the general public, is sure to be valued—such, at least, is the manager's calculation, and by this delicate form of bribery does he hope to secure the favourable opinion of the professed connoisseurs. This practice would not, indeed, be likely to have much effect if it were resorted to with the expectation of conciliating those most austere and fastidious guardians of a pure taste and lofty standard of excellence, in regard to the Fine Arts, who dispatch the musical, dramatic, and other artistic criticism of the press; for those gentlemen, having in their vast experience already seen and heard all that can ever be created or conceived, must of course be indifferent to the temptations of a Private View.

Little children, happily for them and for us, are differently disposed; they find things new and beautiful at every turn, for theirs is the frank and grateful willingness to be pleased, which lends the illusions of its own bright fancy and warm enthusiastic affection to aid even the feeblest and most meagre representations of that which is fair and grand and noble. The boy and girl, who have not yet been spoiled by the contagion of a censorious and denying spirit, will gladly accept, and from the fresh abundance of their free imaginations will complete and glorify, your story, your picture, or your play.

Yet there are some cases in which the opportunity of a Private View may be no less seductive to children. Not that any child can be presumed capable of selling its verdict of approbation for the privilege of a first peep; nor can we doubt but, on the contrary, its enjoyment of the final display would be greatly diminished by having witnessed the preparations, and so more or less anticipated the effect. But there is a peculiar relish, even to the most artless and innocent minds, in such morsels of gratification surreptitiously obtained, which seem not indeed to make one happy at the expense of the others, but to gain him the indulgence a little sooner, without depriving them of the pleasure they are still to expect. Morally, of course, this principle is not justifiable; and, prudentially, it is a great mistake in the long run; for where the cake is equally divided, the boy who does not wait to eat his share at the hour of the general feast is doomed to want another slice, which he shall not get, when his comrades are munching with unanimous and mature delight. But the little German boy, Wilhelm Meister, who slipped into his mother's store-closet and opened the box of puppets which she had provided for the Christmas show, enjoyed then and there his solitary rehearsal of the marvellous play of "Goliath and David," "with that fearful stolen satisfaction which forms," as Goethe remarks, "no small part of the pleasures of childhood."

The treacherous good nature of a nursemaid—so may the reader conjecture—has permitted three or four young spectators of the Christmas-tree, shown in one of our illustrations, to taste this perilous and unadvisable enjoyment of seeing before the due time, and in a very improper place, the rich and splendid fruitage of that celebrated plant, which blooms, in the warm rays of the festive hearth, on the night of the 24th of December. It is a very improper place, as any mother of a family would say. A Christmas-tree in bed! Why, it's turning the world upside down to think of such a thing. What if the children *did* lie awake talking about it, Miss Mary and Miss Lucy in their bed together, saying they hoped there would be a nice doll to be sister to their old Dolly, while Master Frank, in his cot, was calling out to them and saying he knew his papa had brought home a lot of swords, and whips, and drums? Was that any reason for going and fetching the Christmas-tree out of the back parlour, where their mamma and Aunt Jane had left it when it was finished, meaning to have it locked up in the coal-cellar and kept there all next day, to be brought out at the party in the evening, between the last game of forfeits and the supper? Certainly not. This is very wrong. Nurse, we have a great mind to give you warning. Take warning—not to do so again. And, God bless these children! will they ever go to sleep, now that they have seen the Christmas-tree? Oh! you foolish little folk, all your pleasure to-morrow night will be spoiled; and when the tree is ever so beautifully lighted up, you will not care so much about it, because of this Private View.

A NATURAL CURIOSITY.

We give in this issue an illustration of a pine stump which exhibits a singular freak in the process of natural development. It stands on the south-west part of Lot No. 15, First range west of the Township of Caledon, Co. Peel, Ont. It seems to have been two trees growing very close together—in fact, into each other; and at about 8 or 10 feet from the ground they are separated into two, and are at some places about 24 or 30 inches apart; and all parts where separate are completely round and pretty large trees, somewhere between 20 and 30 inches in diameter. When they unite they form one large tree. It has a crack in it on the S. E. side diminishing as it ascends, and two or three feet below where it is broken off, it seems quite solid; the top, which is broken off, is lying a little from the root, and is solid and large—probably three feet in diameter. It seems to have stood long in a dead state, as there is no bark remaining upon it, except a little at one place. The opening between the two separate trees, may be 12 or 14 feet high; that part above the opening 8 or 10 feet, and the diameter at the broken part from 30 inches to 3 feet. All the dimensions are mere guesses; as at the time of making the sketch no attention was paid to the real sizes of the different parts; it was merely sketched in passing, as something curious, and as such it was shown to a number of people, and generally regarded as a curiosity. Among the gnarly kinds of timber growth instances of separation and re-union upon the same root are not at all uncommon, but we are not aware that it has ever been very often remarked among the pines and other woods of straight fibre, at least not to such an extent as that shown in the stump we have illustrated.

An amusing anecdote is related of a man in the south of France, who received a letter from his son in the army, begging him to send him some shoes and some money. The old man, willing to comply with the request, but having no readier means of forwarding the articles than the telegraph, procured the shoes and hung them on the wire. A labourer, returning home from his work, saw the shoes and cut them down, leaving his old ones instead. The old man next day came out to see how the wires had performed, was delighted, and exclaimed, "My poor boy has not only received the shoes, but has sent back his old ones!"