

MY LAST CHRISTMAS IN THE BUSH.

BY HENRY M. STANLEY.

My Christmases have been rarely happy. I find on looking back that, as though I had been pledged to a peculiarly ascetic life, I have been obliged to spend fifteen Christmas days in the wilds of Africa. Others have been spent at sea, some in America, Turkey, Crete, Spain, Jerusalem, all under very different conditions to those which I have experienced in Britain. Most of these days have found me in the midst of some adventure far removed from the pudding and other delicacies of the season which form the theme and delight of British youth, taking troublous thought for the inexorable morrow, brooding over some late calamity, fretting over a comrade's loss, or extracting a modicum of comfort or hopefulness even in the midst of general discontent.

I find in my diary, on December 25th, 1888, notes which will describe to you how we spent our last Christmas in the 'bush.'

The day before we had arrived at the site of a pigmy village, an open circular space, about five hundred feet in diameter, in the midst of the woods. A few of the pigmy huts still stood, though in an uninhabitable condition. We decided to halt over Christmas for many sufficient reasons. Thus Christmas Eve saw us encamped on ground over which generations of pigmies had gambolled. It suited us admirably enough. As there was no clearing to be done, our men's huts were soon ranged round the big circle. In the centre were raised the headquarter tents. We called it 'Cross Roads Camp,' because in the centre of the circle four paths met. One path would take us after a march of forty miles to the green plains near the Albert Nyanza. That which went in an opposite direction, or westerly, would take us to the Congo River, 600 miles away; and by that which led northward we might reach the pastoral grounds of the Makkaraka, 250 miles distant; while by the southerly road, after marching 750 miles, we might emerge from the twilight of the Great Forest, in view of the elephant grasses of the Luama Valley.

When we reached Cross Roads Camp, almost every man in the column thanked God, after his own fashion, that we had only forty miles more to travel before we should see the sheen of the young grass in Mazamboni's land.

Christmas morn in the bush! No, not bush, but forest—if ever eternal tropic woods deserved the name. To us in England, bush suggests a thicket or a shrubbery; but this now under consideration extends over 400,000 square miles, to the extent of two German empires. It took us 160 days to travel through it, burrowing through amazing growths of underwood, and tunnelling under a sea of parasites, and overhead through all this period we saw nothing but the overlapping, leaf-laden arms of the great forest trees, which were of infinite variety of species, and whose height could only be conjectured.

Cross Roads Camp was under the leafy coping of a portion of this forest. The underwood being cleared by the pigmies, it seemed like a huge cavern carved out of solid vegetation. Not even a ray of sunshine could penetrate from above. The ground was damp, as it always is under the dense shade. The atmosphere was mephitic; the rank compost of dead vegetable matter, mixed with the dark dust of dead insects, exhaled an odor as from an open grave, and the strange scents from the perpetual distillations from trunk and branch and leaf mingled strangely with it.

What a Christmas was before us! Our men were almost ravid from hunger. Had we remained there, not a soul would have offered us anything to eat, and we should have starved. Only by foraging far and near could any food be obtained. We were strangers to the country, and knew of no community living within any accessible distance from us. The paths leading from our camp were formed by nomadic dwarfs, who, like ourselves, are here to-day and off to-morrow; but from the nature of the forest people, we argued that there must be some tribe within ten, fifteen, or twenty miles of us, in some direction. The thing we had to do was to discover its locality, and for this purpose we were obliged to send strong parties by the southern and northern tracks to search for

bananas, while the doctor and I should remain to protect the camp and attend to the sick and the feeble.

Therefore, at six o'clock on Christmas Day, the trumpet sounds to muster. Lieutenant Stairs is requested to select fifty-six riflemen to form his foraging party, to go along the south road. A Zanzibari captain, chosen for his courage and good sense, is appointed to conduct a strong party along the northern path. How long they will be absent no one knows. What adventures they will meet is equally unknown. Meantime, we who are left behind in camp must remain in suspense, cherishing a hope that they will succeed in obtaining the means of subsistence so grievously needed.

As the parties march off in opposite directions, those who remain standing at muster are dismissed to their huts, except the dozen pickets who are led away to take their posts of observation around the camp. This is a duty that is never neglected, for every native's hand is against us.

Parke, the doctor, has many duties. The condition of the sick is appalling. Next to my own, his duties are the most onerous. The human system in this dreadful country becomes an easy prey to diseases of the most loathsome kind. We have men in camp suffering from dysentery, ulcers and anæmia, which follow poor nourishment and the privations of travel. We have over eighty prostrated, some of

them I was silent; for the word Christmas had brought with it a host of associations, and suggested exchange of gifts, friendly visits, renewals of friendships, family assemblies, and what not.

Then the word made me think whether I might not do something for the honor of the day. How? What could I do, being in as bad a plight as the least in the Expedition? My eyes fell upon Parke's ragged knees, and then upon his whole figure, so different from the spruceness of the young and dashing officer who, at Alexandria, twenty-three months before, importuned me to allow him to join the Emin Relief Expedition. And quickly my mind glanced over the interval, during which he had given such priceless service to all of us, black and white alike, and grieved that such unshrinking devotion should have its reward deferred—deferred, perhaps, until it was too late to prove our gratitude.

At this thought there was a pang of regret. How could I show him that he was appreciated? Then I remembered that there was a bale of choice cloths reserved for presents to native chiefs, in which there was a new piece of blue serge, which might make him a new suit. Happy thought!

Such mementoes were known to be handy with their needles were called up. An old bale-cover was spread out. Some cotton was cut and unravelled to make thread.



STANLEY'S LAST CHRISTMAS IN AFRICA.

them in such a hopeless condition that they will never leave the spot where they have lain down.

While Parke administers to the necessities of our followers, I take my seat near the baggage, and think. The only things worth thinking about relate to the Expedition. Thoughts about Stairs and his foraging party, and that led by the Zanzibari captain, occupy me; then they drift to Nelson and Bonny, who are bringing up the baggage from Fort Bodo; then they flit to Wadelai, and revolve about Emin and my friend Jephson, and I wonder what has happened to them during our absence from the Albert Nyanza, and why Jephson did not keep his promise and return to Fort Bodo; then they hover over our native friends in Mazamboni's land, and wistfully cling to the abundance of food that awaits our long-tried fellows who may be fortunate enough to survive the journey through the forest; then they fix themselves upon our present surroundings, and my eyes sweep around the camp, at the wall of green underwood, the curious huts and sheds which the men have built, at the tents in the centre of the camp, at the leafy concave above.

Parke returns at this moment from the sick, and reports a man dead, and another dying. The dead body is carried out of the camp a hundred yards beyond, and a pile of leaves and branches is raised over it. As we return to camp, I say: 'Parke, do you know to-day is Christmas?'

'Christmas? So it is. I had forgotten it; and I had made up my mind last night that I should be the first to greet you.'

'It is a strange Christmas,' I said, and

The bale of choice cloths was opened, and the serge was unrolled, and six yards of it were measured. Then, with an old sacque coat as pattern, the stuff for a new jacket was cut, and from a pair of 'knickerbocker' breeches I managed to cut out a new pair of pantaloons. The men were set to work, and, when six tailors are in earnest, a suit sufficiently good for forest wear is soon made.

Stairs, Nelson and Bonny, though absent, received their share, and the tent boys were not forgotten.

By four o'clock in the afternoon the suit of clothes for our doctor was almost completed, and he was gratified to hear for whom it was destined. But at this time we heard the rumblings of thunder. A few drops of rain were heard pattering above. The strange odors rising from the wet humus became thicker. Nearer and nearer came the advancing storm. The high wind began to career among the tree-tops, reminding us of the sound of a surf breaking upon a beach. Each man ran to shelter, as the rain fell in torrents. The gray light darkened, the lightning played about the camp in dazzling sheets of flame, and the thunder crackled and burst upon us in overpowering shocks. The fall of rotten trees and branches added to the tumult and confusion and uneasiness.

For hours we look into the pitchy darkness and watch for the weird white light which reveals everything with startling clearness, until the frequency of these alternations of blackness and flame become soporific, and we retire amid the crash of the elements and the tumultuous rustling of the branches to woo forgetfulness.

This was how we spent the Christmas of 1888, and the very mention of the name will bring back the strange surroundings vividly while life lasts.

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN.

These two words bring us so near together at this happy Christmas time: 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.' I must have told you more than once that only what we can share is the best. I cannot think of my Circle, of some that have so much less than others in the same Circle, and my joy be full; but when I come to Christ, and think He is for 'us,' and that each one of us, so to speak, can have Him all to themselves, this is bliss indeed! Did you ever look long and earnestly into one of the Christmas pictures in the dear old Book—Simeon with Christ in his arms? I do not wonder that he said: 'Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' Some one says: 'All heaven and earth are in our arms when Christ is there.' At this blessed Christmas time I want to think of you all as saying: 'Unto us a Child is born—our King!' Oh, if we would only just echo what God says. I lived once where there was an echo from the top of the hill near our house, and I had a dear little boy, and he loved the echo so much, and nothing pleased him like my calling 'Willie,' and the echo would come back, 'Willie!' and then the great dark eyes would be lifted to mine with such a look of joy and wonderment at hearing his own name. The Christmas bells must ring our name, we must echo the words, 'Unto us!' That means you and me; we must make this personal. I heard a well-known bishop say in a sermon, a short time ago, when speaking from 'The son of God gave Himself for me': 'If I went into a great park, and in that park were wonderful conservatories with the rarest exotics in them, and was told that the park belonged to all, the gift to the city, I would not have the enjoyment that would be mine if on my return home I found a little simple flower, perhaps wilted, that my little child had placed there just for me.' And so, I think in this great Christmas gift of Christ there is a vagueness—a feeling that He is a gift for the race, for humanity. But it must be a personal gift in order to have the joy of all joys. Unto us—unto me—the Child is born; that is to be my gift of gifts through all eternity.—Margaret Bottoms.

THE STORY EVER NEW.

BY FLORENA M. YORK.

Only an old, old story
Of infinite love and grace;
Only a beam of glory
Lighting a baby face.
But through the rolling ages,
No story half so dear;
Of all earth's sunshine glory,
No beams so bright and clear.

Only a manger lowly,
Wherein the sweet Child lay:
Only a mother holy,
Watching the hours away.
Only a sweet song stealing
Down through the quiet skies;
Only a star's soft beaming,
Points where the Baby lies.

Only some shepherds kneeling,
Paying their homage sweet,
Pouring their richest treasures
Down at those Baby feet.
Strains of that far-off anthem
Float through the world since then,
Breathing of 'Joy in Heaven
On earth good-will toward men.'

Hark! to the joyous chorus—
'To you a King is born';
Star of the East now lead us,
Lead us this Christmas morn,
Till, like the faithful shepherds,
We kneel in homage sweet,
And pour our hearts' best treasures
Down at those sacred feet.

Thus reads the sweet old story,
Old, but still ever new;
Know we the wealth of glory
It brings to me and you?
Know we those tiny fingers
Opened Heaven's portals wide?
But for that helpless Baby
All the whole world had died!