

MY CHRISTMAS AT PARIS.

In a quaint chamber in the Latin quarter, the classic ground of ancient Paris, I was awakened by the midnight chimes of Notre Dame. So much of the strange, the beautiful, the marvellous, had poured into my life since touching the fair shores of France, that I had often occasion to repeat what I asked myself then, as the silvered tongues of myriad belfrys of the famous churches of beautiful Paris, added their mite to the universal anthem—"Is it a dream?"

"Mademoiselle, are you ready," asked a soft melodious voice in dulcet French.

It was Serina—Serina of nut-brown hair, cheeks of roses and Madonna eyes, a fresh ribbon in her dainty white cap, and an extra bit of lace on her white apron.

"Hear the bells, Mademoiselle; Christmas is come."

Alas! It was no dream.

Serina was the bright peasant, that Madame, true to social tradition, always insisted should accompany me in my strolls about Paris.

Dear little Serina, my chaperon! I never could suppress an audible smile at the thought, as we strolled together in the boulevards or gardens during those initiatory days into interior French life, more of the world was already mine, than could possibly come to sweet Serina, if the longevity of Methusela was hers! But it pleased Madame, it was a sinecure of the respectability of her house—the penalty of being Mademoiselle, *au bien* Madame.

While the chimes continued their glad tidings, we joined the hurrying footsteps in the narrow Rue. Past the Luxembourg gardens, fragrant with the budding of spring time, its statuary glinting ghost-like under the midnight sky; now in the shadow of the Sarbonne or the Pantheon to encounter beautiful, restful Saint Etienne, its splendid stained glass of the Renaissance aglow, the usual colony of beggars at its doors, opening to admit throngs of worshippers, while was emitted the preparatory strains of the old gray-haired cellist, who, from his favourite seat under the ancient choir-loft, stood out in the haloed relief of a mediæval saint.

Gradually the gay cafes were deserted, *garçons* with the inseparable white towel thrown over their shoulder, peasants in the quaintness of provincial costume, students of every clime, smacking of the *chic* of Bohemianism in cap, jacket or pipe—all phases darted in and out the winding Rues leading towards Notre Dame.

Beyond the bridges of the Seine, mirroring its majestic shadows, rose the famed towers. The Square in front of the Cathedral, which Charlemagne guards from his bronze steed, was thronged with equippages in livery of armorial bearing, cabs of low and high degree, the dress of many climes, the babel of many tongues, all lost in the joyous peals of the chimes as we crossed the famed threshold and knelt beneath the sublime naves.

Steeped in history, song and story, Notre Dame often disappoints the stranger on his first visit.

To fully appreciate the grandeur one must linger frequently in its sombre aisles, especially at the witching hour of sunset, when the prismatic splendour of the windows haloes the waves odoriferous of the vesper incense. It was almost impossible to find kneeling space at the midnight Mass. The triumphant voice of the deep-throated organ over the main entrance, was answered by the string instruments and softer pipes in the sanctuary under the lofty dome, where the white surpliced choir boys chanted Christmas carols as the Archbishop of Paris, and assistant celebrants, in historic vestments that had witnessed the coronation, nuptial, and baptismal ceremonies of Kings, Queens and Emperors, filed into the famous Basilica. The great altar was ablaze with myriad of tapers, and the splendour of Solomon was on every side.

How many hearts in that sea of bowed heads turned in prayer to homes across the sea, as the elevation hushed the majestic edifice!

Christmas at Paris is chiefly a religious fete. Family reunions and exchanges of presents are reserved for New Year's. This is apt to be a disappointment to English-speaking foreigners, and the indifference of the French to

features we had always treasured inseparable from the festival, never ceased to aggravate. We could not adjust ourselves gracefully to a Christmas without special customary preparation, and the exhilaration of giving and receiving.

For weeks before, the magazines and shops were gay with toys, but then are not the shops of Paris perpetual Christmas?

La Grippe silenced the gayety of the Capital, tinging all with a melancholy that vainly struggled to lift at the Yule tide. For successive weeks funerals crossed and recrossed on the church steps; traffic in the streets was frequently checked for hours by continued funeral corteges. One by one schools, theatres, gay gardens and vaudevilles in the Champs de Elysees closed. In many quarters Christmas found scarcely a family that did not wear the habiliment of mourning. Irrepressible Parisian temperament saddened, the effect on the foreigner, as may be imagined, was not a happy one. It fell particularly severe on the student colony, many of whom stricken early, did not recover through the winter to pursue their music, song or painting, while their allowance, often the savings of years of deprivations at home, was consumed by doctors' fees.

La Grippe put to flight the anticipated pleasures of our little world, congenial spirits gathered from the four winds of the earth. There was a bright young Roumanian, daughter of a lady in waiting at the court of the beautiful Carmen Sylva, who gave us pleasant glimpses from behind the throne. Blessed with wealth, she chose her gowns at Worth's and Felix, and while her humble companions admired, they had them cleverly duplicated by an obscure modiste in a little shop near the Bon Marche.

Another bright spirit was a Southern girl, with racy reminiscences of a childhood spent with Amelia Rives Chandler. Then there was a much travelled relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson, not to forget an English damsel, who had basked in the smiles of Marlborough House.

Often we met in sky-lighted apartments, or cafes in the old Latin quarter, and discussed the "isms" of the day, and related personal adventures in inexhaustible Paris. But our resolutions to celebrate Christmas in gastronomic English or American way yielded to La Grippe.

Thankful for strength to be abroad again, we set out after *dejeuner* with an English girl to visit the churches and take in the facial aspects of a Parisian Christmas. The day was glorious, clear, bright and balmy. To the flower market on the square of St. Sulpice, where in bronze Fenelon and Bossuet, overlooked the huge lions' heads jetting forth great sprays into the basin of the fountain, the omnibuses come and go, and the famous seminary of St. Sulpice, and the continuous throng of worshippers on this Christmas morning lent additional animation, we bent our steps to feast on lilacs, lilies of the valley, tulips, all the floral delights of midsummer, with English mistletoe and holly in profusion. The flower markets of Paris are always held on the squares in front of the churches. In great symphonies of one colour, the bouquets peep from huge white paper cornucopias; rarely does one see a nosegay of varied flowers.

"Who is so fortunate as to receive them?" was asked a clerk in a famous flower shop in the Boulevard de Capucine.

"Oh, they are not for you nor for me," was the pharisaical reply, "they are for actresses and the devil!"

At the bon-bon shop windows we bent many an Oliver Twist glance, while the butcher shops and the poultry stalls were not ignored. At all seasons the glass windows and doors of the butcher shops are removed. In the empty space side by side suspended by the hoofs hung whole cows, pigs and sheep. At Christmas they sport a rosebud in their tails, and each animal is outlined by a garland of artificial green leaves and red roses with a dash of holly or mistletoe. The mirror-lined walls of the poultry shops, odorous of the treasures of stream and field, reflect the huge open wood fire, on whose many spittles turn turkey, duck, geese and hare, their dripping fat replenishing the flames which illuminate the dark, narrow rues.

At the box offices before D'Odeon and Comedie Francais, hundreds of working people stood in orderly line, waiting to