

And then at last our bliss,
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for, from this happy day,
The old dragon under ground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurped sway;
And, wrath to see his kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

The oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine.
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathèd spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale,
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-inwoven tresses torn,
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

In consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth,
The Lars and Lemures moan with midnight plaint:
In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the Flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar power foregoes his wonted seat.

Peor and Baalim
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-battered god of Palestine;
And moaned Ashtaroth,
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine;
The Lybe Hammon shrinks his horn,
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

And sullen Moloch, fled,
Bath left in shadows drear
His burning idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with cymbals' ring,
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste.

Nor is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove, or green,
Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud;
Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest;
Nought but profoundest hell can be his shroud;
In vain, with timbrelled anthems dark,
The sable-stoled sorcerers bear his worshipped ark.

He feels from Judah's land
The dreaded Infant's hand,
The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eye;
Nor all the gods beside
Longer dare abide,
Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine;
Our Babe, to show His Godhead true,
Can in His swaddling bands control the damned crew.

MILTON.

HOW I SPENT CHRISTMAS AT HATHERLEY GRANGE.

BY WILLIAM T. URQUHART.

Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.

HATHERLEY GRANGE, DEC. 15, 18—.

HENRY MERTOUN, ESQ.,

MY DEAR SIR:

"If you have no previous engagement come and spend your Christmas at Hatherley. I can promise some good shooting and a 'mount' with the V. W. H. I shall expect you not later than Tuesday, the 23rd."

Yours, very faithfully,
JOHN KINGSFORD.

The above is a copy of a letter which I found lying upon my desk at the War Office when I entered the scene of my accustomed daily duties, one dreary morning about the middle of December. At first I could not remember who this same John Kingsford could be, and it was not until I had pondered for some minutes that I recollected the stout, old Wiltshire squire, whom I had met some months before at the office, when he came on business connected with his son's appointment to a regiment just on the point of embarking for India, and to whom I had been able to render some slight service. The old gentleman had thanked me warmly at the time, and had expressed a hope that he should see me at Hatherley, during the hunting season, but I had thought little of his invitation at the time, and since then the whole matter had escaped my memory. Here, however, was proof positive that he had meant something more than a mere empty compliment, and really wished me to accept his hospitality during the approaching holidays. Very little consideration was needed, and by the return of post I wrote to Mr. Kingsford, accepting his invitation, and promising to leave for Hatherley, by the 4.50 express, on the evening of the 23rd. On Monday night I had a parting smoke and friendly chat with two or three of my special "chums" at the Club, and on the following evening took my seat in a first-class carriage of the G. W. R. express train. Soon the city with its glimmering lights, its mists and shadows, was left behind us, and we were gliding smoothly over the open country at the rate of forty miles an hour. Even in winter, how delightful the fresh country air seemed to one who, like myself, had been for nearly six months a dweller in the close atmosphere of London. Seen dimly in the starlight of the clear frosty evening, Windsor Castle, loomed up against the southern sky in massive grandeur; while here and there the river Thames was seen winding along among the level meadows which, for the most part, form its banks. On, on we sped, by farm-houses, the reflection of whose bright fires seen for a moment, as we rushed past, suggested ideas of happy Christmas gatherings round the family hearth; on, past humble cottages, upon whose snow-covered roofs the starlight fell, making them glisten like silver as we hurried by; sweeping over dark silent rivers, where, in summer time, the tall rushes grow thickly and luxuriantly, and the water-lilies lift up their heads in meek and tranquil beauty; rushing through stations and past long goods sheds, among red and green lights and flashing signals; on, amid light and darkness, until Swindon junction was reached, and I alighted on its spacious platform.

After making some enquiries as to the best mode of reaching Hatherley, I was accosted by a burly comfortable looking groom who, touching his hat, informed me that he was from the Grange, and had come to meet a gentleman who was expected from London. My "traps" were quietly transferred from the train to the dog-cart, and we were soon trotting along the hard road at the rate of ten miles an hour. After about three-quarters of an hour's ride, I saw lights glittering among some trees on the left-hand, and my companion who, up to this time, had scarcely opened his lips since we left Swindon, informed me that we were just approaching the Grange. Entering through an avenue of fine old elm trees which, even at this season when their gaunt branches were divested of foliage, looked grand and imposing, we drove up the broad road to the porch of an Elizabethan mansion of moderate size, from almost every window of which lights glistered, while the sound of music, and peals of silvery laughter proved that it was not a bachelor's Christmas party at which I had been invited to assist, but, that in addition to the hunting and shooting, of which Squire Kingsford had spoken, the still greater attraction of female society might be anticipated. Just as we drove up to the porch, the door opened and my friend appeared. He looked the very incarnation of Christmas time, in fact he might have sat for a portrait of "King Christmas" himself. Tall and strongly made, his features bronzed by exposure, and his open genial countenance wearing an expression of good humour and benevolence, Mr. Kingsford looked the *beau ideal* of the old-fashioned country squire. In his hand he carried a silver tankard containing some warm compound, from which a delicious aroma proceeded. I hastened towards him, and was about to thank him for his kind remembrance, when he prevented me by thrusting the tankard into my hand, exclaiming: "Not a word, my dear sir, not a word, until you have drunk this—take something to warm you after your ride, there will be plenty of time for talk afterwards."

After having obeyed my host's behest I was conducted through a large hall, the walls of which were decorated with antlers, foxes' brushes and the portraits of certain favourite horses and dogs, and thence was led by the squire upstairs into a comfortable apartment, where he left me to make my toilet, telling me that the dinner-bell would ring in a quarter of an hour.

When I descended I found the drawing room filled with guests, most of them neighbours, but some, friends from a distance, who were staying in the house. Mr. Kingsford met me at the door, and leading me up to where two beautiful girls were seated upon a sofa, introduced them to me as his daughters—Miss Maud and Louisa Kingsford. Both were equally lovely, though, in appearance, altogether unlike. Maud, the eldest, was a tall, well-developed girl, with large blue eyes, a profusion of golden hair, and a fresh clear complexion; in fact she was a perfect type of English beauty; Louisa was much shorter than her sister, her hair of a dark-brown shade, and her brown eyes sparkled with fun and vivacity. Her little figure was perfect, and her tiny hands and feet models of symmetry. In disposition, as I afterwards found, they differed as widely as in appearance. Maud was quiet and sentimental, while Louisa was of a lively and mercurial temperament, and young as she was, had already driven more than one young country squire to the verge of madness by her coquettish. Such were the two young ladies before whom I made my bow on that eventful evening. I discovered that Mr. Kingsford was a widower, his family consisting of two daughters and one son who, as I have already mentioned, was attached to a regiment serving in India. When dinner was announced, Maud, the eldest daughter, was conducted to the dining-room by Sir Gilbert Broadfield, while Louisa was assigned to my care. I found her an exceedingly lively companion, and Londoner though I was, and, as I flattered myself, thoroughly *au fait* in small talk and repartee, I experienced considerable difficulty in holding my own with this pretty little country damsel, whose sharp sallies were full of wit and pungency. Nevertheless, beneath all her fun and merriment, it was easy to discern that she was possessed of a kindly disposition and a warm heart. In our conversation about Christmas, she told me about the plans which she and her sister had formed for the benefit of their poorer neighbours, and made me promise to walk with her on Christmas morning and hear her class of Sunday scholars sing their carols, a promise which, as it turned out, I was unable to fulfil.

When the ladies left the room, the conversation turned upon hunting and sporting in general. I found that the V. W. H. hounds were to meet on the following day, at Bramford Wood, a celebrated covert in that neighbourhood, which had never been drawn blank within the memory of man, and almost always held a "straight goer." The squire promised me a mount on one of his most reliable hunters, and at a somewhat late hour we joined the ladies. Maud and Louisa were at the piano, and we had quite a musical evening. Our concert was brought to a conclusion by the following song from the squire himself, which he sang in a rich baritone voice:

KING CHRISTMAS.

Mournfully, wearily,
Sadly and drearily,
Hear the shrill winds of old Winter sing,
Through the woods going,
Shouting and blowing,
Harbingers they of the Christmas King.

Who shall dethrone him?
Who dare disown him?
Who will gain say his lordly will?
Banish all sorrow,
"Let care come to-morrow."
Hurrah for a merry Christmas still!

Then be not down-hearted,
Though sin's last we parted,
From this stout old King of the closing year,
Loved ones have left us,
And Death hath bereft us,
Of those who were loving and true and dear.

Let's welcome him merrily,
And sing to him cheerily,
And cheer in his presence the falling year:
With holly we'll crown him,
In wassail we'll drown him,
And hope for the best in the coming year!

When I looked out of my bed-room window the next morning, the mist was rising from off the meadows, the sky overhead was dull and cloudy, and everything betokened the dawning of a day in all respects well-fitted for hunting. On descending to breakfast I found most of the gentlemen in pink; the two Miss Kingsfords did not appear, but when the hour for mounting approached they joined us in the dining-room, dressed in well-fitting riding habits and white plumed hats. Soon we were all *en route* for Bramford Wood. We jogged pleasantly along the rugged narrow country lane, which led to the place of meeting. Just as we arrived beside the covert, the hounds with the huntsman and attendant whips came in sight. In a few minutes the hounds were thrown into the cover, and I, in company with the Miss Kingsfords and one or two others, proceeded along one of the rides. Scarcely a word was spoken as we rode along, and not a sound was heard, save the crackling of the whips, the rustling of the horses among the dead leaves, and now and then a word of encouragement to the hounds from the old white-haired huntsman.

Soon, however, the music of the pack rang cheerfully through the woods as they came upon the trail of a fox. Now commenced a tightening of girths, a setting of hats more firmly on the head, and a series of single combats between impatient horses and irritating riders. The initiated, however, trotted briskly on, followed by most of the field; the trot soon became a gallop, a faint "tally ho" was heard in the distance, and then the old wood resounded with the thunder of hurried horse hoofs; now we dashed across the wide pastures, up the hillside, and along the valley—crackling through the fields of stubble, sweeping along the velvet meadows on, on, over ditch and gate, and hurdle, and fence, rendering the field more select; no fear now of over-riding the pack, the only trouble was to keep near them. On by the copse side, startling the pheasants as we passed, without check, for more than an hour did this headlong race continue. Now dashing among the beech woods that clothe the hill-sides, and then crossing the narrow slip of table-land on the top, we sweep like an avalanche down the other side. As we neared the bottom, a loud, wild halloo announced that the fox was in sight, and there sure enough he was, but a few yards in advance of the pack. He sprang at the high park wall which was at the bottom of the hill, and after one or two efforts, succeeded in climbing it—the hounds close upon him. The huntsman cleared it, while the rest of the horsemen galloped down the steep, chalky lane in search of a gate.

Meanwhile, mounted on a steady going old hunter, I had managed to maintain my position, not, indeed, among the foremost flight of riders, but among the stragglers who, following in their wake, were far in advance of the main body of the field. Louisa Kingsford, who was a much more daring horsewoman than her sister, was near me, her pretty chestnut thoroughbred skimming easily along, and taking the fences in his stride. Side by side we rode down the steep lane which I have mentioned, and then leaping a low stone wall, struck across the level meadows over which the hounds were now running with their heads up and the fox in view. Across the second of these meadows a black, sluggish stream crept slowly along. Its width was comparatively trifling, and all that rendered it at all formidable as a jump to a well mounted rider was the rottenness of its banks in some places, and the fact that it abounded in deep holes. As we approached I glanced round at Louisa to see if she intended facing it. She smiled gaily, and I saw that neither she nor the chestnut had any idea of refusing it. The banks on either side at the point at which we were approaching the brook appeared to be tolerably firm, and my horse went at it and cleared it without any difficulty. As soon as I was over I looked back to see Louisa safely over. At the moment I did so there was a cry of terror, and then I saw that the overhanging bank had given way, and that my companion's horse had fallen headlong into one of the deep holes I have mentioned. Louisa had been thrown from the saddle, and as I dismounted and hurried back, I saw her face upturned for a single moment, and then sink beneath the cold dark waters. Meanwhile the chestnut was splashing and struggling violently, so that poor Louisa was not only in danger of drowning, but incurred an imminent risk of being killed by a blow from her horse. It was not more than a few seconds that I stood horror-stricken on the bank, and yet the thoughts that crowded upon my brain in that brief space of time would take many minutes to describe and enumerate. It was not the mere pain of seeing a lovely girl die so cruel a death that caused that deadly pang at my heart, and chilled the blood in my veins. In an instant I felt and knew beyond all question that I loved Louisa Kingsford; that if she perished then my life henceforward would be a hopeless blank, which no ray of light or love could ever illumine. I hesitated no longer, but hastily throwing off my hat and coat, leaped down the steep precipitous bank, determined to rescue her or die with her. The waters closed over me as I sank down almost to the bottom of the pool. As I did so my hand came in contact with the skirt of her riding habit, and then with a violent effort I succeeded in extricating her from the saddle, to which she was attached by the folds of her dress, and I rose to the surface bearing her on my arm. A number of horsemen had now collected, and were taking measures for our rescue. The chestnut, still struggling furiously, was vainly endeavouring to scramble up the bank. As the poor animal did so, his foothold gave way, and he fell backwards upon me, almost crushing me by his weight, and bearing me down into the pool once more. I exerted all my strength to pull Louisa as far as I could towards the bank, then the waters closed over me, I felt a terrible blow upon my chest and shoulders, and I remember nothing more.

A scent of rose-leaves, the sound of a distant peal of bells, and the soft rustle of a lady's garments—these are my recollections on waking to light and life again. The pleasurable sensation of extreme languor, with neither the desire or necessity for exertion, was upon me.