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THE FRIARS' CHRISTMAS.

(Chicago Current.)

In the Convent of St. Joseph, high above the Pinchon Pass,
Fifty monks before the altar knelt to say the Christ-
mas mass;
And as they knelt, but little cared they for the solemn
words they said,
All their thoughts were on the dainties for their
Christmas dinner spread.

Much they murmured at the Abbot for his slow and
measured drone,
"Will he never close the service?" Suddenly a clearer
tone
Rang above them: "For His coming, who to save a
world from sin
Left the glory of the heavens for the manger of an
inn.

"Is this mockery your welcome? Is it thus you keep
the Day
Blessed forever by the Christ child that on Mary's
bosom lay?
Will you feast while others famish? In the homes of
want below
Men are starving—find them—feed them. For His
sake arise and go!"

Robed and cassocked from the convent fifty friars
took their way.
Downward through the holy stillness of the blessed
Christmas Day;
Black against the drifted snow-banks showed their
figures as they went,
Much they looked like birds of rapine on a evil errand
bent.

Birds of rescue, not of rapine, were the black-robed
brotherhood,
Like the raven heaven appointed to supply the pro-
phet's food.
To the needy and the dying gifts of life and strength
they bore,
In the homes of want dividing all their cherished
Christmas store.

Robed and cassocked up the mount'n through the
dying light of day
Climbed the fifty weary friars. Long and dreary was
the way;
At its end no Christmas dainties waited for them in
the hall,
Bread and water formed their dinner. Of their Christ-
mas this was all.

But their joy what heart can measure when above the
Abbot's drone
As he led their vesper service rang again that clearer
tone:
Ye are blessed in blessing others; whose lendeth to
the Lord
Findeth here and more hereafter his exceeding great
reward.

"Christ the Gift rewards true giving. He is ever
found of them
Who with gifts of heart and service seek for Him in
Bethlehem—
Ye have found Him." Into silence died the lingering
notes away:
In the hush the Abbot whispered: "Nunc precamur
—let us pray."

—Hosea Gordon Blake.

CHRISTMAS.

Christmas is a festival which has been observed
from a very early age of the Church. While no one
pretends that it is the exact birthday of our Lord
and Saviour, yet we believe for various reasons that
His birth took place in the winter, and about the
time of the winter solstice. At all events, the whole
Christian Church agrees in celebrating our Lord's
birthday on the twenty-fifth of December, and all
celebrate it much in the same way, with solemn
and joyful hymns of praise, with churches decked
with evergreens, with exchanges of gifts and good
wishes.

To the young it is usually a season of unmixed
pleasure. They look forward to it for weeks before-
hand, and enjoy the little mysteries of making and
buying presents, and preparing pleasant surprises
for parents and friends. All hearts seem to open.
The workman has a holiday and perhaps a gift
from his employer. Even the prisoner and the
pauper sit down to a Christmas dinner on that day,
and are often remembered with gifts by those in

happier circumstances than themselves. Would
they were always so remembered. Would that all
so far as they are able, might keep Christmas in
the spirit of our Lord's precept: "When thou
makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the halt
and the blind" (St. Luke xiv., 18).

But as we grow older, Christmas, like other
things, changes its aspect. All our anniversaries
become saddened, and this one is no exception.
To the recent mourner it recalls one who last year
sat at the board, who will sit there no more. The
mother put away the little stocking which will
never be hung up again, and even the children
speak sadly and with tears of the sister or brother
whom no present can reach. At such times it must
be the religious aspect of the day which alone can
bring comfort and joy. The parent, the husband
are gone it is true, but not far. The tie remains
unbroken. The little one is safe in the arms of
Him who though He was the Mighty God, was also
as at this time a baby in His mother's arms. The
veil has fallen it is true, but it is only a veil,
and will soon be lifted. Let us then still keep the
feast. Let the gift which cannot reach the beloved
hands be put into hands which would else be empty.
Let us still rejoice that Jesus Christ is born, because
in Him we have the promise that all tears shall be
wiped away.

It may be that some one will read these words
who is a wanderer by his own fault from home and
friends and all the once-prized joys of Christmas-
tide. To such an one we say: The season has a
message for you if you will hear it. The Babe of
Bethlehem was born for you, however deeply you
have sinned. You may be far away, herding swine
in the desert, filled with the fruit of your own
devices, hungry and feeding on husks; yet your
place in your Father's house is still kept for you,
and no one else will ever fill it. Your Father's
eyes are watching for you, your Father's heart goes
out to you no matter how far you have strayed,
the robe and the ring are still waiting, and may be
your Christmas gift if you will.

Then let us all rejoice in the Lord. Let us take
the Holy Babe to our houses and hearts, new-born
for every one who will receive Him. Let us lay
our gifts at His feet, and however poor and humble
they may be they shall be gilded by His smile and
blessed by His love. And though we cannot come
to the Babe of Bethlehem like the wise men of old,
with gold and gems and precious perfumes, let us
lay at His feet the gift he will value far more, even
the gift of ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a
reasonable, holy and acceptable sacrifice, knowing
that He will accept the gift and make it fit to shine
in His Kingdom for evermore.

"Young men and maidens, old men and child-
ren, praise the name of the Lord, for His name
only is excellent and His praise above all the earth."
—Parish Visitor.

THE TWO CHRISTMAS TREES.

Bark was strewn in the street, and the carriages
glided like noiseless shadows past the great man-
sion where the young widowed countess lived. The
door-bell was taken off, and the broad steps were
covered with thick carpets; for death sat by the
head of the bed where lay the widow's only child.
It had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly, just at
the time of the children's great festival, on the first
year the Christmas-tree was to be lighted for the
little rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed boy. Now the tree
stood there decked from top to root, bending its
boughs under the wealth of gifts, but no one thought
of lighting the colored candles, for the red cheeks
were pale, the blue eyes dim. Just as the Christ-
mas bells were ringing, he bent his head with the
last sigh. The young widow was childless.

The earth had received what belonged to the
dust, the father no longer rested alone in the quiet
churchyard behind the iron fence; but she—how
lonely she was! How empty was her home and
her heart! A few days after, the very last day of
the whole year, as she sat by the grave, how
agonizing it was to think of the past twelvemonth,
when every day the child's merry shouts had waked
her in the morning.

Wearied by weeping, her eyes wandered over the
iron railing. A new grave had been added since

she had brought her sacrifice—a poor person's
grave with a plain wooden cross. Some wreaths
of moss lay on the earth, and above the cross hung
a home-made garland of pine-twigs. When she
went away she passed it, stopped, and read a very
common name—a middle aged man lay beneath.

A few steps from the mound she met the grave-
digger strolling along with a rake in his hand.
The young countess stopped him to give an order,
and, as she passed on, inquired who occupied the
new grave.

"A poor workman, who was drowned," was the
reply.

"Drowned?"

"Yes, your ladyship; and leaves a wife and
seven children."

"So she still has children with rosy cheeks and
sparkling eyes. She is richer than I," sighed the
widow.

"No, pardon me," replied the grave-digger, lean-
ing on his rake; "she has pale-faced, dull-eyed
children. It's a sad Christmas for the poor people."

The countess went back and took a wreath heavy
with flowers, one of many, from her child's grave;
but when she approached the wooden cross to hang
it there in place of the pine garland, the man
stopped her.

"No, let it stay. That wreath is most suitable,
and it has its story, too."

"Tell me the story."

"Yes, your ladyship; it isn't long. You see,
the man who lies there had some money left over,
for he was sober and diligent, so he bought a little
Christmas-tree for the children, which was to have
been lighted New Year's Eve; but the green
branches were put to a different use, because the
widow had no means to get a better wreath."

The rich woman silently bowed her head, then
rose, stately and beautiful, saying:

"Where does she live, sitting in her sorrow
among her pale-faced children?"

The way led through narrow streets, high up a
dilapidated staircase, and the countess had much
difficulty in finding it; but at last she reached the
room. A strange, damp odor of wet walls and old
clothes greeted her. There sat the mother, sewing
by the fading daylight, while the children's pallid
faces peered out of the corners. The rich and the
poor woman gazed silently at each other a moment,
then the countess said, slowly and sadly:

"We have graves side by side in the churchyard.
You have children and no Christmas-tree; I have
a Christmas-tree but no children. Rise and follow
me."

The woman stared irresolutely at her strange
guest, but the countess continued:

"Don't you understand me? I am telling you
that I have come for you all. Follow me at once,
just as you are, you and all your children."

So the tree was lighted. It cast a ruddy glow on
the children's blanched faces, and their dull eyes
began to sparkle. But as the little ones shouted
joyously around the two windows, the poor woman
flung herself at the countess' feet—she wanted to
express her thanks, but could not. The lady raised
her, saying:

"You see, I have been thinking so constantly
about my boy, he was the light of my eyes and the
joy of my heart, and now to-night a great sense of
consolation has come upon me. When children
rejoice, the children's angels rejoice too, and among
them, I firmly believe, is my own boy. You have
many mouths, and I plenty of bread. Come to me,
and we shall both receive a blessing from what God
has given us—the Christmas blessing, for it was
the two Christmas-trees that brought us together."

—Translated from the Danish, by J. M. Percival.

CHRISTMAS DECORATION.

Where there is opportunity and the disposition
to study Christmas decoration, the appended clip-
pings from a city daily will be serviceable.

The old order of stringing wreaths from central
points overhead to wall and column, is a ruinous
measure for the acoustic of any church, and has
taken the life and sparkle of many an elaborate
Christmas music service.

Evergreens, of course, are first to be thought of
in connection with decorations. With evergreens