

HOLIDAY GREENS

THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Without mentioning the fact that the Christmas tree is a very popular custom in our own country...



The oak mistletoe, an essential element in the bloody ceremonies of old heathen gods...

Very likely derived the practice either from the Celtic nations or from the Saturnalia of the Romans...

When St. Augustine arrived in Britain he was wise enough to utilize the pagan customs by giving them a Christian significance...

With a grand sweep of his hand the stranger has dashed forward...

My God, Ned, it was for her! She is dying!

The strong hand of the young seaman is on the other's arm, and the face is even whiter as he demands:

What do you mean? She is dying! Where? Speak, man! Tell me at once!

The young man turned and is at the vessel's side before Old Tom can call out: "Where are you going? You will kill her. Didn't I tell you she is dying?"

From the other's breast comes a groan, a deep, prolonged one, and he says in an altered tone:

Lad me to her. God will not rob me of her now. Come along.

The two pass over the wharf and go down into the cabin of the old boat from which the dim light is shining...

The father was the first to descend, and he turned at the entrance to restrain his companion.

The surprise is too sudden. The young man drew back into the shadow while the other lifted up the woman and seated her by the berth.

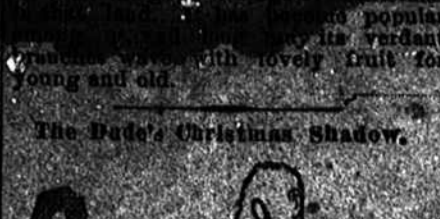
She looked at him more intently than ever, and there was an eager, appealing look in her eyes.

It will not do to leave our subject...

THE BIRD'S CHRISTMAS SHADOW

Young and old

Never in his life did Teddy have such a hard time going to sleep as on that night before Christmas.



Why, I am afraid Santa Claus won't have a chance to come here to-night!

Oh, dear! I will go to sleep this minute! And Teddy pats his hands over his eyes to hold them shut.

When the young man told Santa you wanted him to come, you saw how wide open the door was!

It took Teddy a full minute to make up his mind whether it was a real little man or only a make-believe one.

By this time he had looked him all over, another beam of light was peeping in at the window, fighting up all the dark corners of the room.



You may be sure he was glad that he went to sleep in time for Santa Claus to come.

One of the most prominent South Jersey "industries" is the preparation of evergreen decorations for Christmas and New Year's.

The Mistletoe. When winter nights grow long, and winds without blow cold, we seek a ring round the warm wood fire, and try to look grave as maids should be.

Off For a Foreign Shore. Mr. and Mrs. Gobbler, in anticipation of Christmas, depart hastily for Europe.



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ON CHRISTMAS EVE

It had been falling early in the day, but only a white fleck here and there marked the distant rooftops and a thin frosty layer made the string-pieces show in the dark like a glittering line.

Down by the water's edge the night was silent and gloomy. Only the hoarse gurgling of the stream filtering through the slimy piles under the pier, only the distant wash of a paddle broke upon the monotonous creaking of chains and cables, the same big, stiff ones that Old Tom Saunders had seen make fast the newly arrived bark at nightfall.

He had been striding up and down the bare deck of the dusky canal boat to keep himself warm ever since the stranger had loomed up on the other side of the pier. He had heard screaming in the slip beyond the whistle of the tug boat that had brought her in, and seen the bustling little craft steam away with the puffs and smoke from her funnel leaving a luminous trail in the dark.

From that gloom had been thicker about the pier and the damp mist rolling up from the bay had wrapped the shipping in a shroud of moisture. There had been a clatter of voices for a while on the big bark, and he had been half-conscious of lifting lights and hoarse sea orders, but all these had ceased long ago and now the black hull of the new arrival rose up in the gloom, solemn and silent, with her masts slightly tilted off and a lantern forward gleaming like a dim yellow star.

Old Tom Saunders paced the deck of the dingy hulk he was on, with his pipe gripped fast between his teeth and his hands stowed away down in the pockets of his threadbare pea-jacket. The battered and decaying boat was no shabbier and more woe-begone than the man. Old Tom was by virtue of the years that had turned his few straggling locks gray and drawn all sorts of deep furrows across his face. Familiarly, Old Tom among the wharf men, who knew him as such ever since he had come along on the old canal boat, a broken-down man with a favored better times about him.

He was a goodly old Tom, in consequence of the fondness for the hippo of that name which it was hinted had dragged him down to his present low estate. Old Tom Saunders had once been a big man, and he was still a big man, but he had lost all his flesh. His face looked like worn parchment, and his eyes, bleached out appearances of life of constant excesses, looked like a pair of dead, staring, twining things, his lips and that timeless wonder of the fingers which broken a coast is unquitting and shattered.

In low spirits indeed he seemed this night of Christmas Eve as he stopped at the stern of the canal boat to look out toward the big black warehouses that shad in the river side like a wall. Up in the air a red light bled over the city where the lights of countless lamps on the thoroughfares beneath had set the damp atmosphere aglow, and from some lofty buildings the radiance of electricity showed in the fog, blue and pallid, as death lights at some infernal orgy.

So this is Christmas Eve, eh? muttered Old Tom with a snort that was

Then paled the bells more loud and deep. "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep! The wrong shall fall. With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Henry W. Longfellow

It had to make it away unbeknownst to her. He muttered, "I'm afraid she'd take on a deal if she knew it, for she hangs on to any keepsake of his for bare life. But what's the use?"

And the ring and hand that held it went down into the pocket again. "What's the use of 'em," sentimental and self-indulgent, he said, "when a square meal can be got for 'em, and 'praps a little drop 'd drop away the chill?"

He glanced, half-frightened, half-apolitely, at the little window as he spoke, slipped carefully by the occupant of the cabin, reached the pier and stepped out.

It was only a moment's space after which there sounded among the low, harsh whispers of the river something that seemed deep in the darkness, but not of it—something suggestive of heat and light and home, and not of this black flood and these great marliner phantoms standing so solemn in the gloom.

It was the cry of a child. Low and weak, suppressed as soon as uttered, it still had a strange shrillness in the silent place, and of all the sad voices of tide and timbers, it seemed by far the saddest. It came from the cabin of an old bark boat, came only for an instant and died away in what fancy involuntarily pictured a mother's kisses and caresses.

Old Tom heard it half way up to the wharf. He heard it and arrested his cautious footsteps and brought his about in a twinkling to the tiny-lighted space in the cabin that barely reached his eye where he stood. The cry was not repeated. But he stood there for over a minute with his whole soul, it seemed, intent upon that dim glimmering pane. He had mechanically groping in his pocket, touched the ring and it seemed to startle him. He took out the little trinket and looked at it carefully, as though making sure that it was really there, and brushed it with a rough, greasy sleeve. Then, without a glance at the street on which he had been walking, he passed back along the pier, crossed to the boat again and walked straight up to the cabin and entered.

A ship's lantern hanging from the roof showed a rough table, a couple of boxes, a tarpaulin, some odds of rope, and on a loosened and slanting berth an infant with a woman kneeling beside it. It was a pleasing face she turned up to the old man as he came in, peering and had been very pretty—but there was a sad gauntness about it now. In the dark, tender eyes looked out from blueish hollows.

"Where have you been, father?" she asked. "Baby has been restless again. I'm afraid that the child is growing worse. This with a look of infinite sorrow. "And it's so hard to see the poor dear suffering and he able to do nothing. Why, father, what is the matter?"

"The poor man was standing with his head sunk upon his breast, and great tears were rolling down his faded cheeks. His eyes were fixed upon the little cabin window, but it was clear that his mind was far away. He started as she spoke, and when he answered it was in a voice broken with sobs.

son to claim you, my little wife, and when I do I'll come like a man, willing and able to take care of you and take odds from no one."

"Whoever you see that sing think of me and remember that I will be working there and keep my word. He went away then and never tied never to doubt him. But it is hard to see a man who had been nothing. He may be dead, he cannot be untrue. Disappointed and perplexed as I am I will not believe it. But no words no word. It is that is killing me."

Old Tom arose and walked the length of his cabin, then turned about and came back to the seat of the box. Then he leaned over to her and said:

"I'm agoin' to tell you something, Libbie. It's somethin' I oughter told you long ago but I didn't have the courag' to, to own up to what a scoundrel I was."

The woman dried her tears, and there was a look of interest in the pale face that encouraged him to go on. But he still hesitated, and said to her with a trembling voice, "You won't cuss me, Libbie, will you; had as I may be you'll forgive me now that I've come around and mean to do better."

She remained impassive and only said "Go on, father."

"I will, I will, if it kills me. Libbie, don't you worry yourself on account of Ned's sickness by no. He was true to you all along. He wrote to you. He sent money to you. He never forgot you, poor boy, and I—I tuck letters, money and all."

The man groveled down upon his knees beside the box and his head sank upon his hands. It was that moment the veriest picture of humiliation and remorse. But she before whom he humbled himself did not seem to see him. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy and her lips opened and closed as though she were speaking to some one unseen.

Then she rose with a cry of "Edward, my husband, whom I would have wronged by doubting, come to me, come, or I will die," and fell on the floor in a swoon.

The old man, all in a tremble, crept to her, raised her in his arms, dashed water into her face, laid her down again, and rushing to a shelf, felt for a bottle and held it to the light. Empty. A curse upon the very brow that had brought rain and was gone when his hands, wrung his own, and then starting up like a madman, dashed out into the street and across the pier and down the side of the big bark. There was no sound of rain there, but he sprang for the lower rigging, grabbed it and clambered on the deck.

He saw a figure peering up and down in the dark and the yellow light forward showed a couple of seamen who had risen from a roll of rope. He turned toward them, and with hands stretched thrillingly, he called out:

"For God's sake, mates, let me have a drop of grog, or somethin'." Me, gal, me daughter's dyin' over on the boat here, and I've nothin' to bring her tea-

son to claim you, my little wife, and when I do I'll come like a man, willing and able to take care of you and take odds from no one."

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