

LONE HALLOWES

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Brenda Linthorpe returned. She was dressed as completely as was her lover. She did not betray the slightest fear; only excitement.

"Well," she smiled, "as you're determined on ghost-hunting—can I be your pack? PLEASE?—it's a grand Christmas night's adventure, Brian!"

Featonby tried to dissuade the girl, but his words had no value in the face of her determination. He shrugged his shoulders and gave in at last.

"Right! You can join in—you ought to be a valuable ally, Brenda. I suppose you know every back and corner of Lone Hallows?"

"Yes—why do you ask?"

"For this reason," Brian Featonby returned, "I want to be taken to the oldest part of it. If this place was once a priory—where does the priory end and the house begin? My point is this: the ghostly moans, or whatever they are, dare to invade our presence—our best policy of attack, Brenda, seems to be an immediate invasion of theirs; you understand?"

"For all that he was ill-temperant and that a smile was on his lips, Brenda Linthorpe made a serious answer."

"I see what you mean, Brian, strangely enough there is a very clear point of distinction between the habitable part of the Hallows and the old priory. If you don't mind getting your head bumped here—and the possibility of barking your shins on bushes—will you go down to it if you like?"

"Lead on, Mac Brenda," Featonby misquoted.

The way that Brenda Linthorpe indicated was a narrow one and hazardous. It led from below the cellars of Lone Hallows, through the widge cellars to a CUL-DE-SAC half filled by rubble; vaulted, low and tortuous. For nearly forty yards, fifteen feet above ground level, that narrow passage ran—it terminated in a tall and pointed wall.

Nothing much to be discovered here, Brenda!" Featonby muttered sulkily. "The only thing I find it good for is the receipt 'LOVE, my some simply written'."

"Ajine ajine!" Brenda Linthorpe was equally as sulkily. "I feel as though someone—something, devilish was looking at me."

Linthorpe slipped one arm about her waist and drew her to him. "When I confessed to seeing Brenda I did not imagine horrors! Anyhow, nothing to be gained by dodging about in this hole; we'd better get back to the old and snail's pace. By the way, Brenda, what exactly was this passage made for, do you know?"

"They say it was the way made by one Brother Hugh Templehurst, one of uncle's monkish ancestors, toward his organ, and—"

"Huh! WHAT?" Featonby twisted about a quick look, light burning in his eyes. "His organ, you say?"

"Yes—why the excitement, Brian?"

"Where's the organ, can you answer me that question, Brenda?"

"It's just since the Reformation I should say! You surely don't suspect it of being in existence at all this time, Brian?"

Brian Featonby was very silent. He seemed to be studying some weighty problem entirely pleasant in his thoughts. At last—

"I don't know a lot about monks and their ways, but I do know sufficient to set me agog about this little problem—now, I wonder, what he meant that panelling? In the days of the Reformation, when monastic establishments were being razed wholesale, the monks, jealous of their treasures, were usually quite enough to hide them away under the earth, for preference—to save them from the ravaging hands of Henry—the Eighth's merry men. An 'organ' was a tremendous treasure!"

"He looked quickly at the panelling; all thoughts of ghosts and hauntings had been deterred from his mind. "I wonder now—WONDER! Has anyone ever been in the far side of that woodwork, Brenda?"

"Why not—the only stone, walling and wood, fastened up against a bulwark of earth, dear! This passage leads to the end of the foundations, according to the plans of the place. As you say, and I know, let's go. It's strewn down here—AWFUL! She hissed. "No adventure after all, Brian. Yet, you've had your wish; you've got us near to the mystery of Lone Hallows as ever you're likely to get."

A movement; a twist, it seemed, or vapour—the smoke passing through flame—a cold draught and—a face; a leathery, awful head of death; a thing of horror piled upon an inebriate form of writhing legs and quivering arms. A thing was this like a man, but was an unlife living man as any form of death. It had movement and being with them for ornamentation—then, was not.

Brenda Linthorpe screamed and fell half swooning to the dusty floor. Featonby fired straight at the dreadful shape two shots.

With a roar and a gust of foul air the whole of the old panelling crashed to ruin. With its pleroma by the bottom the ancient texture fell apart, as the touch of a warm finger things apart the soft texture of a mummy—and no wall, stone lay there, behind, like a gap—a doorway, giving on to a great and vaulted chamber. And in a fault line of moonlight, creeping down from some rift in the roof of that cavernous place, toward the mighty pipes and mechanism of a great organ—Missals, scrolls, books, plates—Old furnishings, censers, sanctuary lamps, vessels of silver and of gold—and like a veritable line of bundles of seraphs, headed by brilliant bones—HEADS, heads, heads, heads—

Voices called—the rapid tread of feet sounded, doors clashed and the whole of Lone Hallows, assailed by the shots, was life.

Christmas morning and the softly stealing sound of bells sweeping gladly across the snowy earth. The sides of Lone Hallows lay in peace and all around the house was beauty.

Yet in the house itself all was wild excitement. The treasures of the ancient monks lay piled in glittering rows. Thousands of pounds worth of gold and silver was there—and manuscripts and charivari and pieces of wood. The dead still lay where they had lain for four long centuries—the organ was still silent down there in the cavern of the earth.

"A marvelous find," said Dr. Hinwell, speaking boldly and in awe. "A truly wonderful contribution to the intellectual wealth of the century!"

Old Squire Linthorpe laughed shortly. "Maybe, maybe, Doctor Hinwell, but—hang it all, Lone Hallows has lost in assets—his lot his ghosts! His eyes twinkled as he surveyed Brenda's face and Brian Featonby's face. "We've taken from the shades their means of midwinter worship!"

"I agree," said that wise young man. "I agree," said that, who young man.

"Oh! That's a climb down, if you please! Then you do withdraw."

"AND apologies," grinned Featonby. "What do you say, Brenda?"

"I'm thinking about time, Brian. There are more death in heaven and earth, you know. If we saw now, the festival of dead, it's Christmas morning across a year and looks forward to—"

"Just like, my Brenda—LIFE!" murmured Brian Featonby, and unashamedly he kissed her.

Christmas



Good Tidings of Great Joy

Where Christ Was Cradled

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low turbans are new; their hoddled buckets are fresh from the hot dippers of wives and daughters. These are the notables of Bethlehem.

They have been to meet the Latin patriarch who has come from Jerusalem. He is always behind a stately, impressive figure in rich, even, patterned vestments, with a bouquet of almost equally splendid pearls, bearing aloft towering canopies and magnificent banners, while behind streams a picturesque mob of priests and people.

A VENERABLE FANE:

One by one these hundreds of worshippers, that through the low, narrow door leading into the church, until the building was full almost to suffocation. In the great nave beneath the stately columns, still standing where they were set up by constant builders—centuries before this day was a nation, when Britain was but a diocese of a province of the Empire, we may partly realize the vast antiquity of this ancient fane, the most venerable in Christendom. Jerome paced these aisles. The Britons of whom Paula wrote to her friend, Marcia, in Rome as "out of our world, beyond the setting sun," stood here, and yondered and adored. Very dim and far off seems the time when one day at dawn, in 1099, Tancred's chosen knights came and scratched the crests and devices we may still discern on the smooth surface of the columns. Yet to them the columns were already ancient.

From the church and its dignified and solemn serried ranks descended a flight of narrow stone steps to the south choir aisle and found myself in the famous "Grotto of the Nativity," the actual cavern to which the eyes of the world have turned at Christmas for more than thirteen hundred years.

It is hard to realize our position. On every hand costly marbles, rich embroidery, and jewelled lamps meet the eye. There is little to suggest a cave or a stable; yet it is the fact that we are in a veritable cavern surrounded by rugged masses of limestone rock, though these are marked by an interior lining of marble.

The Babe of Love

By the Rev. Thomas Walker, (Formerly Chaplain on the "Iron Duke")

"Unto you is born a Saviour;" Christmas is so much the time for reactions and family rejoicing that sometimes we miss its personal message. Yet its message is primarily a personal one. Unto you, separately and individually is born a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord.

That Birth is the biggest thing that ever happened in the world's history. Do you believe it? To be really convinced and certain about it changes our outlook upon life entirely. For one thing, it makes it possible to believe in a God Who knows by bitter experience life's difficulties and temptations; Who shares and feels keenly all life's sorrows and joys because He has in His own Person felt them all; Who puts His arm round us to help us along; a God with an irresistible appeal to our hearts and, claim to our loyalty and service. For that is how God shows Himself to us in the Birth at Bethlehem.

Secondly, it becomes possible to believe in human nature, in each man's personal worth and value. The world as man has made it is rather a drab place, but if God thought it worth while to become man for our sakes, then surely it makes it very plain that we all are of tremendous value. That God sets such a high value on us brings again the call to loyalty to the Personal Christ, emptying has unlifted and dignified the whole of our lives.

In this world where it is so easy to go down and so hard to go up, we do need some really deep passionate conviction which assures us all along life's way of the intense care and love of God—something which raises our self-respect and clothes us with high dignity. And we have just that something, if we believe, really and passionately, in the Child Who was born at Bethlehem, in the Little Child with the heart so wide that it takes the whole world in.

SCENE OF THE INCARNATION:

The eyes turn at once to a small seats close to the floor at the side of the cavern. Around it the pilgrims are crowding, to throw themselves upon the pavement and kiss the stones; for this is the very spot upon which it is believed that the world's Redeemer was born. A silver star is set into the pavement, surrounded by the inscription, HIC DE MARIA VIRGINE JESUS CHRISTI NATUS EST: Here of the Virgin Mary Jesus Christ was born.

In the recess hang many jewelled lamps of gold and silver; for the different communities of the place share the privilege of keeping these lamps always burning. All around are rich embroideries, and above is a slab used by the Greeks as an altar.

On the other side of the entrance from the stairway is another room in which it is believed that the manger cradle of the Holy Child was placed. If this be so, then we were standing on the very spot where the shepherds knelt when they came to see the Infant King.

The traditional cradle was taken to the Church of St. Maria Maggiore, Rome in the fifteenth century, and now a marble one takes its place. But this does not interfere with the devotion of the crowd of pilgrims, many of whose eyes are bedimmed with tears as they gaze upon the spot hallowed by so many sacred associations.

THE MANGER

(Continued from page 3)

conclusion that we weren't going to get married, and he was just telling me how he had lost the only girl he ever really loved. Don't be too proud, Mary; he was selfish, and didn't understand."

And, smiling at them both she left the room.

When she was in the corridor she hesitated a moment, then went to the telephone in her bedroom and picked up the receiver.

"Miss Vanderhof speaking," she said. "Please ring up the Embassy and leave a message for Mr. Vanderhof when he arrives to say that his daughter and Sir Henry Ripplingham have been detained; and have my car sent round for me at once."

Then she put on a big sable coat, half smiled at herself in the mirror, and in a few minutes was in her parlour.

"Hill View, Hampstead," she told the chauffeur, and went back to the corner.

Well, it is wonderful what can be done by a beautiful, gentle, loved, and determined young woman when she has once made up her mind to a thing.

The very efficient matron of that home for children will always remember one special Christmas Eve, partly because on it she broke all her rules, partly because it was the first time that she saw Vivien Vanderhof.

"You have a baby called Betty here," said Vivien, "about two years old; and please I want to take her away with me at once, you can ring up the Savoy and find out all about me, my name is Vanderhof, and my car is waiting for us; and please forgive me for coming at such an hour, but it is most important!"

She got her way! In an incredibly short time she was driving back to the hotel, a sleeping child rolled up in blankets in her arms.

And then, with rather flushed cheeks and very bright eyes she walked into the drawing room, still carrying the baby.

Harry and Elizabeth were sitting on a big sofa, and though her eyes were red there was a happy smile on her face.

"I have brought you a Christmas present," said Vivien; and she put the sleeping child down on the sofa, close to the table on which stood the tiny manger.

Hidden Treasure

ROMANTIC STORIES OF CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

(By "Thornton Hall")

To millions of children, not only in our own Empire, but in many a foreign land, such as Germany, Holland and Belgium, the Christmas Stocking is perhaps the greatest of Yuletide anticipations and delights, all are more fascinating as it is enveloped in so much mystery.

And it is right that it should be so; for its originator was, it is said, none other than the great St. Nicholas himself, or Santa Klaus, as the Dutch call the Saint. According to Nuongengus, the versifier of ancient customs—

St. Nicholas money used to give to maidens secretly, Who, that he still may use his wonted liberality, The mothers all their children on the eve do cause to fast, And when they every one at night in senseless sleep are cast, Both apples, nuts, and pears they bring, and other things beside, As cups and shoes, and petticoats, which secretly they hide, And, in the morning found, they say, that this St. Nicholas brought.

And if tradition is to be believed, a stocking was the favourite hiding place of the Saint's largesse. Of one Christmas stocking the founder of a well-known store tells a very pretty and romantic story.

One day a stranger called to see him—on Saturday the 23rd, of December—and asked him, if possible, to prepare "a great big stocking" for his daughter who was ill, and to have it ready by Christmas morning. It was to contain a large doll, dinner and tea sets, a cooking-stove and pots and pans, several articles of doll's furniture, and a box full of dolls' clothes.

That evening, although they were overwhelmed with work, the stocking was made on the premises. It was covered in blue satin, trimmed with silver-tinsel and tied with blue ribbons; and, as it was too late to be delivered by one of the carts and the next day was Sunday, it was determined that the child should not be disappointed. So on Sunday evening (Christmas Eve) the great shopkeeper himself got out his car, drove to business premises and secured a Father Christmas wig and cloak. These he placed in the car with the great blue satin stocking, and a little after one a. m. on Christmas morning he accompanied the night porter at the hotel by driving up arrayed as Santa Klaus. He had donned the wig and cloak as he heard his destination, and asking for the number of little Miss's room, sent up a telephone message to her father's room.

In a few minutes Daddy appeared, arrayed in his dressing-gown, and apparently recognised the visitor in spite of his disguise. "Bless you," he said, "I thought you'd forgotten all about us!" They went to the little girl's room together, and her father woke her up just as the strange "Santa" was about to disappear through the door, and told her to blow a kiss to Father Christmas, who had just brought her the beautiful big stocking.

But it is not only to children that the Christmas stocking brings delight and surprise. Only last year a young lady awoke on Christmas morning to find a stocking attached to the rail at the foot of her bed. It was, as she quickly guessed, the Yuletide gift of a man who had won her heart, and whose heart she felt sure she had won, but who had never summoned up courage to put his fate to the test of a proposal.

It was with eager fingers that she opened the stocking, full of curiosity to explore its contents. One by one she extracted a small box of chocolates, a box of Turkish cigarettes and a microscopic vanity bag. Then, at last, when her heart sank at the thought that not even a word of greeting was within, she found in the "toe" of the stocking a tiny casket wrapped in a half-sheet of paper.

As she read the contents of the paper she discovered that the long-delayed offer had come at last. And on opening the casket she found a beautiful diamond engagement ring.

No less delightful was the experience of a young lady who, on Christmas morning three years ago, received a "lucky stocking" from her fiancé at the foot of which she found one of the most costly and beautiful cracker ever made. In the toe it was insignificant, for it was little longer than the palm of her hand its actual length was just over four inches but its cost was £500.

It consisted of a tiny sheaf of wheat, fashioned so cunningly of pure gold that its modelling by one of the most skilful goldsmiths was the work of six months; and in the centre was concealed a ring set with pearls of the most perfect shape and purity.

The three daughters of an American millionaire, who were on their way to the States for the purpose of their lives when on Christmas morning last year, among the contents of their stockings each found a small golden casket bearing her pet-name in brilliants.

On opening the caskets each revealed a cracker of lace-edged silk, which, beautiful as it was, was in disappointing contrast to the gorgeous casket which held it. On opening the cracker, however, there blazed forth dazzling lights from a collared necklace of diamonds of the purest water, the cost of which was said to be at least £10,000.

But perhaps the most romantic of these stories is that of Miss, Rosalie Montobaldi, a poor lace-maker of St. Didier-la-Neuve, a Department of Haute Loire. She hung up one of her stockings at the foot of her bed, little dreaming what a revolution this act was to work in her life.

On awaking on Christmas morning she opened her stocking to find the usual small presents from her parents and her brothers and sisters; and, last of all a small slip of printed paper with the message attached—"All I have to give you is—'May I bring you good luck!' signed by a friend, 'Sophie Carlier.'"

The paper, Mademoiselle saw, was a ticket in a Christmas Lottery, and she smiled with pleasure at the kind thought as she folded the ticket up and put it in her purse.

A few days later she chanced to see the result of the lottery in a local paper; taking the ticket out of her purse, she was amazed and delighted to find that the ticket from which she had hoped nothing had actually won a prize of a quarter of a million francs.

Santa Claus

The words 'Santa Claus' are a corruption of Saint Nicholas, the patron Saint of Children. In olden times, the disguise he assumed was that of a Bishop. Nowadays he is much more picturesque.