MAXIMS OF A MERE MAN

How the whole world is brightened in the ruddy Christmas glow.

THE CHARLOTTETOWN GUARDIAN

The People's Paper — Read by Everybody

Covers Prince Edward Island Like the Dew

MAXIMS OF A MERE MAN

Born in Bethlehem, Lord of all the earth, King of Kings.

Charlottetown Guardian, Two Cents. Morning Guardian, Founded 1887.

CHARLOTTETOWN, CANADA, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1940

Second Section

Annual Subscription Delivered, $5.00. By Mail: P.E.I., $4.00; Canada and U. S. $5.00

A Merry Christmas

Beautiful Legends of Christmas Season

There are many quaint and beautiful customs practised in the Old World during the festival time of Christmas customs which have been handed down from sire to son, and which live on through the years in spite of the inroads that modernism has made. For these old customs and practices that have come down from a bygone age seem to have a strange fascination as the Yuletide season approaches, and they hold and carry an appeal that reaches out to people of all ranks, and so today in many parts of the world we find them practised in the humblest homes of the peasant.

And although Christmas is the greatest of all Christian festivals, many of the quaintest customs associated with it have come down from pagan times, becoming a part of the Christian fastival as the people were gradually weaned away from paganism. For whatever of good or beauty was found in paganism the Church adopted as far as it was possible, thereby making the conversion of many easier than it would have been if all the trappings that went with paganism were entirely abolished.

Few Christmas stories that come from the Old World fail to mention the Yule log, and in England and other countries it still blazes on the hearth at Christmas time. This was one of the customs that originated with the pagans, for it was first practised in Scandinavia, where a huge log was set on fire in honor of Thor, whose festival was kept at the time of the winter solstice. In many parts of Europe the dragging homes from the woods of this Yule log is one of the big events of the year and it is a source of great excitement, especially to the children.

After it is brought home it is placed across the wide open hearth and on Christmas Eve it is lighted by the master of the house and there it smolders and burns for several days.

The custom of using evergreens for festive decorations goes away back to the time of Nehemiah, when the people were commanded to go forth into the mount for olive branches and thick trees with which to make booths. The fir and pine trees have always been classed with the world's sacred trees and there are many legends connected with the use of the fir tree at Christmas.

Some claim that it is of Egyptian origin, as those ancient people had a custom of decorating their homes with the branches of the date palm, which signified that life would be triumphant over death. Others claim that the Christmas tree is a continuation of the Assyrian "Tree of Great Light." Rome also claims a part in the origin, while the Norse legends say it comes from the great tree "Yggdrasil."

From ancient days the tree has been used by men of all faith as a symbol of life everlasting.

Some think that the Christmas tree had its origin in the time-honored "Jesse Tree" so often used in church windows and mural decorative schemes. It was a symbolic family tree with its root in Jesse and its crowning fruit in Jesus.

The old legend about a saint who came upon a great company of people in a forest on a hillside which was crowned by an enormous Tunder oak, where a child was bound at the foot of an altar ready to be sacrificed in order to appease the great god Thor, is one that is worthy of mention.

The fire was burning brightly, sending its flames heavenward, when the saint approached, and with his staff knocked the axe out of the heathen priest's hand as he was about to slay the child. He then grasped the axe and smashed the altar to pieces. A miraculous storm arose at this juncture, which broke the sacred tree into four pieces. Then the good saint told the frightened people the true story of Jesus, which resulted in the conversion of the heathen.

Turning to the fir tree, he said: "Here is the living tree with no stain of blood on it, it shall be the sign of your new worship, see how it points to the sky. Let us call it the tree of the Christ Child. You shall go no more into the forest to keep your feasts with secret rites of shame; instead you shall keep them at home with laughter and songs and rites of love.

A beautiful custom prevails in Ireland on Christmas Eve. In every home a lighted candle is placed in an open window and from there its rays shine forth into the night. This is done to guide any wanderers that might be abroad, lest they should have to wander far seeking shelter as Mary and Joseph had to do at Bethlehem.

In many parts of Ireland there is a legend told on Christmas Eve that the mother of the Savior wanders abroad and often comes to the door of some house seeking shelter for herself and babe. So on this night in parts of Erin the latchstring is on the outside of the door for all.

In Scotland it is the custom to give double fodder to cattle on this night and it is known in many parts of the British Isles as the night of two suppers, one of which is eaten before and the other after midnight.

A Scotch legend tells that Saint Bride lived at the time of Christ's birth and was a little serving maid in the inn at Bethlehem to which Mary and Joseph came. Because of some service which she rendered to Mary when she came there seeking shelter she is known as "Muime Criosta" which means foster-mother of Christ.

It is believed by many in the Old World that the gates of heaven are open wide on this night and are left open all through Christmas Day, and that all who die on this day are bade to enter. It is also believed that no evil spirit of any kind can be abroad on this night to practise their wiles, for all are banished from the face of the earth, for on this night good triumphs over evil in everything.

(15th Century "Nativity" by Francesco di Pietra Santa, Rome)

And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed . . . And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galille, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David): to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them,

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manager."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

At The Shrine Of Nativity

Pilgrims from a war-torn world will arrive by thousands on Christmas Eve at the shrine of the nativity in Bethlehem to pray that Christ's message again will prevail.

They will pray that peace shall return to nations which have lost it. They will ask that goodwill will reign again in the hearts of men according to the teachings of Him whose natal hour they celebrate.

To the worshippers who approach the Church of the Nativity the message of peace will be clear —as it was on that distant night when Herod ruled Jerusalem, when Christ was born to the Virgin Mary.

From a balcony overlooking the large square fronting the church, the multitude will be seen slowly approaching the small, breasthigh entrance.

Lines of people will stream through the crypt inside the church itself in which is marked the spot the manger stood which couched Mary so many centuries ago and to which came the Three Wise Men bearing gifts.

Kneeling, black-robed nuns pray continuously to the sound of shuffling feet; monks move with long tapers to fulfill their tasks; British policemen mingle with civilians who come to spend Christmas Eve in the holiest city of Christendom.

Throughout the early part of the night hushed throngs will wait for the midnight mass and the climax of the ceremony of the Nativity — carrying the effigy of the Christ child from the Convent of Ste. Catherine to the site of the manger.

As dark falls the church fills rapidly with ranking army officers, members of the consular corps, high government officials and rich and poor of the citizenry —come to hear vespers sung in the little town of Bethlehem.

They await the midnight hour, for the bells of Bethlehem to peal the message of peace on earth, to hear the patriarch pronounce the consecration, to see drawn aside the jewelled curtains shrouding the tabernacle above the high altar to reveal the baby.

Yuletide Lore

Canada has borrowed Christmas customs from other countries and other centuries—adding here and discarding there until the customs of 1940 have evolved.

Santa Claus, for example, bears the name he does in Canada because this is the British version of the Dutch Saint Nicholas. The original Saint Nicholas was Bishop of Smyrna during the Diocletian persecutions and after his death he became the patron saint of little children, merchants, travellers, sailors, thieves, pawnbrokers and maiden ladies.

The gifts that Santa Claus is supposed to bring had their origin in a legend about him which tells how he gave dowries to three daughters of a poor tradesman. Out of this legend grew the custom of hanging up the stockings of little children on the Eve of St. Nicholas on December 5, the custom being transferred to Christmas later. Others say the presents given at Christmas are birthday presents suggested by example of the Wise Men.

The Christmas tree which has become an almost universal symbol probably came to the North American continent from German soil although one tradition has it that the Christmas tree had its origin in Egypt at a period long before the Christian era. The palm tree is supposed to put forth a branch every month and a spray of this tree with twelve shoots on it was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice as a sign of the year completed.

Holly, with its thorns and blood-red berries, is thought to symbolize the crown of thorns worn by the Saviour. Another belief is that the use of holly as a Christmas decoration came to us from the pagans. Holly is believed to be particularly hateful to witches and at one time it was thought that, unless a maiden adorned her bed with a sprig of berried holly, she would be visited by a mischevous goblin.

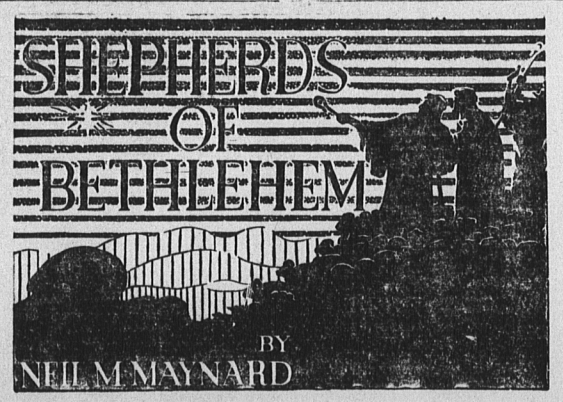
Mistletoe, called by the Druids "All-Heal," was thought to hold many miraculous virtues. The Scandinavians dedicated it to their Goddess of Love, Friga. Probably the Goddess of Love is responsible for the custom of kissing under the mistletoe.

The superstitious believe that a maiden who is not kissed under the mistletoe will not marry during the ensuing year. The privilege of kissing under the mistletoe is supposed to be measured by the number of berries the branch contains. The custom in Canada of lighting shrubs and small trees in the garden with electric lights at Christmas is believed to have been brought to this country from Sweden where it has long been customary to leave lights burning in the windows of the house at this season.

The Wassail bowl, so named from the Saxon "was hael" or "be in health," carried by the children singing carols, owes its origin to the custom of drinking the health of friends in the spiced wine drink at Christmas time in mediaeval days. It was a spiced and sweetened drink served in huge bowls with roasted apples floating in it.

These old customs and others have survived although time has brought changes in them. And so it is that at Christmas quaint customs are followed by a composite of lore, legend and tradition from many lands, indicative by this very fact of the universality of the Christmas spirit.

"On Earth peace, goodwill toward men."



He comes on the wings of the ages,
The Child who is ever a Child,
He comes to the shepherds and sages,
To the wise and the undefiled.

Three humble shepherds who were tending their flocks by night on the Judean hills, were the first to hear the glorious tidings of the birth of the Christ Child proclaimed by the Angels, and were the first to prostrate themselves in adoration before the new-born King in the cave of Bethlehem. The number is believed to represent the three races descended from Noah, and the shepherds' names were Joseph, Isaac and Jacob.

In their own country, tradition tells, they were specially honoured after the event which groups them with the Holy Family in the cave, and after their deaths, their bodies were reverently guarded.

This must be true, for, in the fourth century, when St. Helena went to the Holy Land on her successful quest of relics of Our Lord's Passion, she found the Tomb of the Shepherds, and around it she had built a beautiful church which she dedicated to the honour of "The Holy Angels of the Nativity and the Three Shepherds."

To-day, during Christmas, priests and pilgrims proceeded to the spot, singing the gloria.

Relics Taken to Spain

To-day, during the solemnities of Christmas, priests and pilgrims proceed to the spot singing the Gloria in honour of the Shepherds to whom the heavenly song of peace and goodwill was first sung. But only the crypt remains, for the building fell into decay in about the middle of the ninth century, when the bodies of the Shepherds were removed to Jerusalem and were there treasured for nearly one hundred years.

Spanish historians claim that the bodies were carried to Spain and placed in a church at Ledesma in the diocese of Salamanca. This claim seems to be genuinely founded for Ledesma was always specially noted for its devotion to the Shepherds of Bethlehem, and furthermore, on July 16th, 1864, the Bishop of Salamanca caused the relics to be removed from the Church of St. Peter in that city, to the larger church of SS. Peter and Ferdinand. Here they were placed beneath the High Altar in a casket "formed as a coffin, nailed, cemented and fastened with a lock."

Village Still There

Before the final sealing they were examined and found to include three skulls, several bones, fragments of ancient wearing apparel, a small shovel, an old piece of iron scissors, and a couple of broken shepherds' crooks. Some of the contents, chiefly the pieces of bone, were found wrapped in a cloth separate from the general collection, and attached to the packet was a paper with the inscription:—

Of the glorious Joseph, Isaac and Jacob, shepherds of Bethlehem, who merited to see and adore before all others, Christ our Lord, born in a stable.

They walked in threes, each group composed of an old man, a middle-aged man, and a youth.

But not only after their death, but throughout the centuries since, the memory of the Shepherds is held green. The present-day visitor to Bethlehem will see, a little beyond the town, a hamlet comprised of huts, called the "Village of the Shepherds" which, from oldest Hebrew times, has been used exclusively as a settlement for tenders of neighbouring flocks. Here, the favoured men lived with their families, and in the "Fields of the Shepherds" that lies behind the Basilica of the Nativity, they heard the Angels sing joyously: "Peace on earth, goodwill to men."

Until recent years it was customary for the shepherds of the Sabine Hills to descend into Rome during the opening days of Advent, singing, to the accompaniment of their lutes, of the approaching Festival of the Nativity. They walked in threes, each group composed of an old man, a middle-aged man, and a youth, representing the three ages of man.

(Copyright: Publishing Arrangement with N. F. L.)

Good King Wenceslas

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep, and crisp, and even:
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?
Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain.

'Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine-logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch, forth they went.
Forth they went together;
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

'Sir, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger:
Fails my heart, I know not how;
I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page;
Tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod.
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saints had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

O Little Town of Bethelhem

O little town of Bethlehem!
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sins, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!

Amen.

The Story of this Fine Old Hymn

Spending the Christmas of 1866 in the Holy Land, a young clergyman, the Rev. Phillips Brooks, wrote on of the best beloved Christmas carols of the nineteenth century.

Phillips Brooks was a direct descendant of a great family of Puritan divines, including the Rev. John Cotton. He was one of six sons, four of whom entered the ministery of the Protestant Episcopal Church He was born in Boston, Mass., on December 13, 1835. A graduate of Harvard University (1855) he became rector of the Church of the Advent, Philadelphia, in 1862. During the Civil War he warmly espoused the cause of the North and the Negro. In 1869 he became rector of Trinity Church, Boston, where he preached, Sunday after Sunday, to great congregations until he was consecrated Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891. After a brief but great episcopate he died, unmarried, on June 23, 1893, and he is regarded as one of the greatest figures in the history of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

One enthusiasitc biographer describes Phillips Brooks in these glowing words: "Posterity will never see his princely form towering six feet and a half in height; his majestic face, combining the thoughtfulness and fire of Webster with the sweetness of Fenelon or Fletcher, and his massive frame, impressing one first as a gaint, yet so filled with light and life that he seemed as radiant as an angel".

"O little town of Bethlehem" is Phillips Brooks' best-known hymn and few Christmas carols rival it in popularity. He had spent some months in travel and at Christmas time, found himself in the accual country of Nativity of Christ.

After an early dinner," he wrote home, "we took our horses and rode to Bethlehem. In about two hours we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surroundd by its terraced gardens. It is a good-looking town, better built than any other we have seen in Palastine. Before dark we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star. It is fenced piece of ground with a cave in it (all the Holy places are caves here), in which strangely enough, they put the shepherds. That story is absurd, but somewhere in the fields we rode through the shepherds must have been. As we passed, the shepherds were still keeping watch o'er their flocks."

In the program of the Christmas services of the Sunday School of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Boston, in 1863, the carol was first printed and it was sung to the tune by Mr. Lewis H. Redner. Mr. Redner was organist of the church and the beautiful tune, wedded to these words, found immediate favor and was soon being sung at Christmas services all over this continent and in Great Britain, where Phillips Brooks was well known and much appreciated because of his determined stand against slavery.

What Makes Christmas

It was not the angel's singing
Gave the Christmas thought,
Not the precious gold and incense
By the Wise Men brought;

Not the shinning star that led them
On their unknown way;
'Twas the Christ within the manger
Made the Christmas Day.

So 'tis not the tree and presents
Make OUR Christmas Day,
'Tis not what we get that counts,
But—what we give away.

'Tis the joy of loving service
Makes the glad hours bright,
Thinking first of others' pleasure,
Self put out of sight.

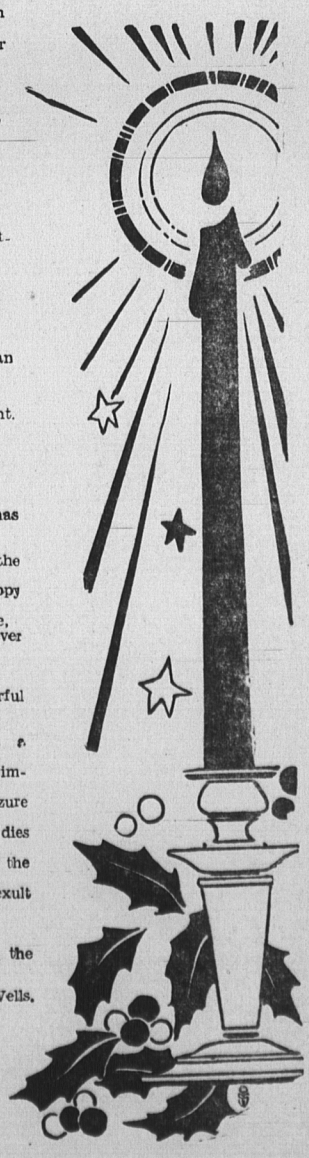
We need never mourn that Christmas
Comes but once a year,
Since the blessedness of giving
Brings the Christmas cheer.

If we keep the Christmas spirit
In our hearts always,
Through the whole year we can make it
Christmas every day.

—Anne Johnson Flint.

Christmas Star

"Seven points hath the Christmas star:
One is the love that shines afar
From God to man; and one is the Lord above;
And one is good will on the happy earth;
And one is purity, one is peace,
And two are joys that never cease—
God's joy,
Man's joy—
Aflame in the star of the wonderful Birth.

"The Light of God's love is a golden light,
And man's love to man is a crimson bright,
And man's love to God is an azure ray,
Alas, when it flickers and dies away!
And the seven rays through the worshipping night,
Like the flash of all jewels exult and play—
God's joy,
Man's joy—
Yet they shine on as one, and the star is white."

—Amos Wells.