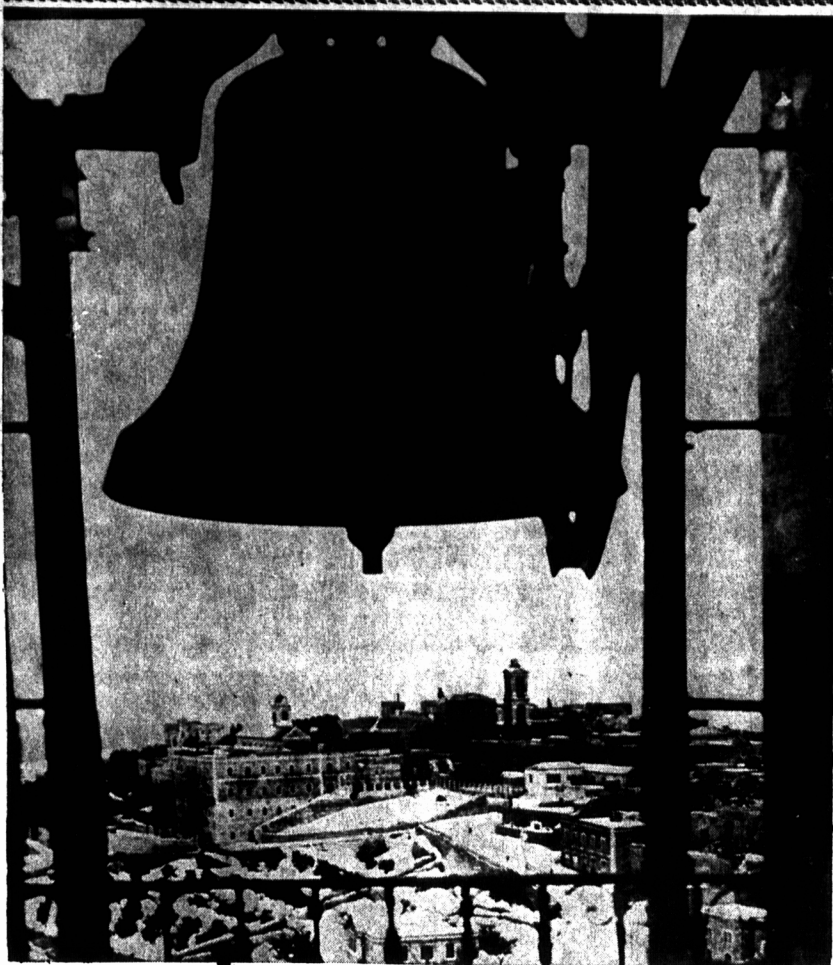


Christmas Of Hope

By MONICA DEHN



Bethlehem from the Bell Tower of the Church of the Nativity

By MONICA DEHN

Jerusalem, Israel.

The Star of Bethlehem hangs every Christmas like the lamp of God over the little white, stone houses of the town where Jesus was born. And those who see it, as they make their pilgrimage on Christmas Eve to the church built on the site of the inn that had no room, cannot help lowering their eyes in shame after the first exalted glance. Its vivid brilliance pierces the heart with its ignored message — peace on earth and goodwill towards men.

In the lifetime of most of us, there has been little peace on earth and little goodwill towards men. Only at Christmas, for a brief twenty-four hours, have hatreds and suspicions faded into a bonhomie which one look at the Star has forced honest men to recognise as, at best, temporary.

But this year there is a difference: this year the hatreds and suspicions really are less. Those who have been preparing for Christmas expect a flood of pilgrims not only from all over the Middle East but from Europe and the United States as well — all eager to give thanks to the Son of Peace for the long-delayed hope of Peace.

Bethlehem has not a single room to let over the Christmas holidays. Until the Great Powers began their talks in the quiet Geneva setting, there were signs of just the normal pilgrimage. Afterwards, the Bethlehem postman's sack became heavier. By late summer, there was not even stable space to spare. Now tourists are seeking shelter in schools, convents, hospices and private houses. Many Bethlehem families are sharing rooms to make way for them, but some of the families, too, will have to sleep on the cobbles of the main square. They will lie restlessly on borrowed carpets or with their

heads on the bellies of their tired, sprawling donkeys and camels. Those lucky enough to have a roof over their heads will find their new homes primitive, but in keeping with the Christmas spirit. The mattresses are stuffed with straw and are as prickly and sweet-smelling as that on which Mary laid the infant two thousand years ago. Washing is done at an outside pump which draws water from the same well from which Joseph doubtless brought water to Mary after her travail.

But the pilgrims won't mind. Crowding into Bethlehem this Christmas are Britons from Cyprus, Americans from the oil-fields of Arabia and Iran, a regiment of Church groups from France, Italy and Spain, Christian Arabs from all over Jordan-held Palestine, from Damascus and from Jordan's capital of Amman. About 2,000 Christians are coming from the State of Israel, where the barbed wire and the dragon's teeth (ank traps) dividing Jew from Moslem have again been temporarily pierced in the spirit of the faith they both respect.

In the evening, as Midnight Mass begins in the simple Church of the Nativity, the congregation will represent the millions of the world's citizens who, if they could, would come to pray for peace.

Black-hooded nuns from Czarist Russia — very old and frail now — kneel side by side with the women of Bethlehem in their white coifs — dating from the days of the Crusaders. There are men in lounge suits; diplomats in full ceremonial dress with silver swords at their side; consular officials in morning coats; labourers in worn work clothes. The light of a thousand tapers flickers on the pale faces of Europeans, on the darker, olive shades of those from the Middle East, the black skins of Africa and the mahogany of India. As the service progresses, with

the Latin Patriarch, resplendent in purple robes glittering with jewels, and the fresh-faced young choir boys leading the congregation in the grand liturgy of Christmas music, worshippers feel the intensity of the ceremony surge through them on this special night.

Midnight approaches and the Patriarch holds aloft the figure of Jesus before carrying it to the grotto and placing it reverently in the manger. The packed congregation hold their breath. Even the candles seem to stop spluttering and for a moment there is a great silence.

Then, with a crashing clarion the bells of Bethlehem peal out the joyful news that another Christmas has begun. In Jerusalem and Nazareth and by the Sea of Galilee and on the Mount of Olives — wherever Christ walked and preached and men have built a Church to commemorate Him — the notes of O come all ye faithful break the quietness of the night. But it is in Bethlehem, where the Star hangs low — vivid as a warning of danger or a beacon of hope — that Christmas means most.

And this year the pilgrims believe that the spirit of Christmas will live a little longer throughout the world than it has in recent times.

NOTABLE DATE

December 27th, 1904, is a notable date in the Christmas records of the theatre. It was the first night of the initial production of Sir James Barrie's immortal play "Peter Pan." The title part was played by Nina Boucicault, Wendy by Hilda Trevelyan, and Gerald Du Maurier doubled the characters of Captain Hook and Mr. Darling. Today, fifty years later, Peter Pan is still a universal Christmas favourite with young and old alike.



(By Nancy Plyler)

The small boy pressed his face closer to the window. Outside the snow lay a white blanket over the community, and darkness had drawn its curtain upon the day's activities. Johnny had been standing there since dinner.

His mother and father sat nearby. "He hardly touched his dinner!" his mother explained. "It's too bad! He was very fond of that dog." His father said seriously.

"I'm so sorry this happened. It's just two weeks until Christmas and there's so much to do. Scouring the neighborhood for the dog at this time will interfere with our other plans," the mother said. While they were talking, the doorbell rang. The wife went to answer it and found two teen-age boys on the porch.

"Yes?" the wife questioned. The boys seemed to be out of breath from running. "Mrs. Porter, we saw two men take your dog into their car. They drove away with him," one of the boys explained.

"What? When?" the wife was beside herself. "About two hours ago. We were taking the groceries to Mrs. Jane; we couldn't turn back to tell you. Besides the car was gone before we knew what had happened. I think we'd know them if we saw them again," the boys finished.

"Don't you come here?" Mrs. Porter called to her husband. "Now, will you please tell my husband what you have just told me?" she turned to the boys. They reiterated the same facts to Mr. Porter.

His first statement was, "Don't say anything about this to Johnny."

He questioned the boys further, thought for a time, then asked the boys if they would agree to go around the neighborhood with him to see if he could trace the men.

Agreeing to this, the two boys left with Mr. Porter. Mrs. Porter was sitting in the living-room when Mr. Porter returned. Her eyes questioned what her lips could not say.

"No luck!" he sunk into a chair. "I didn't really think there would be any use to go out and look for them. There just wasn't anything else to do. Poor kid! With Christmas coming on and everything." Mr. Porter was very solemn.

On Christmas morning Mrs. Porter was up very early. The Christmas tree was trimmed to perfection. The wreaths were hung. The living-room was very picturesque. Johnny's stocking was hung over the mantle; it was brimming to the top. All kinds of toys that would delight the heart of a five-year-old boy were under the tree. His mother took one last look before she called to her husband to awaken Johnny.

A sleepy, tousled-haired boy crept down the steps to behold the wonders of another Christmas day. After viewing the scene, he gave one leap to the hobby-horse that waited for him. By now he was no longer sleepy, but had mustered enough energy to open all his gifts without any help from his parents.

And for a time Johnny seemed so engrossed in the many toys that he never mentioned about his dog. But their hopes were short-lived! For while they were planning for the day, they noticed that Johnny was watching at the window. Mr. and Mrs. Porter looked at each other and knew that they had lost in their endeavor to make Christmas Day a happy time for their boy.

When Mrs. Porter was nearly on the verge of tears, Johnny gave one scream from the window. They ran to it and looking out, saw a small white dog scurrying up the

Singapore Christmas

By JAMES WICKENDEN

The jungle behind was a fret-work of green and black shadow and the sea in front was a gray-blue lake. A small wavelet discreetly curled over on the sand. It was quiet, the air hung heavy for early morning, and it was Christmas Day.

The three of us, Mary and the boy and myself, were the only white family in a Chinese village on the coast of Singapore island.

I lay in bed looking through the open door of the bungalow — it

ed Colonel Blimps. They stood round the door, whispering. Then Chew Fatt produced a gold-toothed smile and a pink invitation card the size of a chain-store menu. Would we come to a party that evening at the coffee shop? The Jurong Welfare Society, the local Chinese organisation, was holding its annual opera.

This, I knew, would be a three day affair, the village transformed into a babel of screams and bangs from a travelling theatrical company complete with orchestra and

the shouts of medicine peddlers. We accepted gratefully.

There were more smiles and they went. Ahmat then came to the door to say that his father was going to slip the moorings on my yacht and pole it out to the anchorage beyond the creek mouth in readiness for an afternoon sail.

The meal was a success and as evening drew on we heard the opera start. When we reached the village we saw that over the jetty had been built a high, rickety stage. Continued on page 13



It was in a Malay Village like this that K. James Wickenden spent his strange island Christmas.

was only one large room partitioned into three — and waited for the morning breeze. The fishing fleet would catch it and come over the bar at the mouth of the creek a few hundred yards away.

The boy was already on the sand chasing hermit crabs. He stopped occasionally to pick some coral and put it in the bucket he carried. Then faintly we heard the banging of sweeps and the Chinese prawn fishermen brought in their flat-bottomed boat.

They swept up the creek, standing and pushing the sweeps, their faces gaunt and their clothes flapping, like a row of spectres. But there was money in prawns; enough to buy a bottle of good French brandy now and then for cold nights beyond the kelongs, or fish traps, standing in the shallows beyond the low tide mark.

Mary had bought a turkey at the cold store eighteen miles away in Singapore. There were nuts, raisins, stuffing for the bird and a box of crackers. We had the basis of a feast. There might even be some more cards if we could be energetic enough to walk the half mile to the fortified police station overlooking the jetty, where the mail was delivered.

The meal was the main thing. We would cook it in a portable tin oven over the primus stove. I got up to put the bottles of wine to cool in the water tank when three figures came splashing through the shallows which at high tide separated the hut and its sand-bar from the mainland. One I recognised as Chew Fatt, a rotund dealer in wire netting, corrugated iron sheets and fishing lines.

Following them was Ahmat, a small, naked Malay boy from the village, throwing stones at the water snakes. As they approached, the mud-crabs popped into their holes and withdrew their bulbous red claws, like a series of disturbances.

path. Mr. Porter never opened a door more gleefully and the dog dashed into the room, into the arms of his master. Johnny was laughing and crying at the same time. "Did Santa Claus send him back to me, Mommy?" was all he asked.

"Yes, dear," she whispered. "The dog either broke away; or the spirit of Christmas must have worked in those men's hearts." Mrs. Porter smiled to her husband.



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of friendship and good-will know no boundaries of race or creed. It is with this in mind, we say to all -- May you and yours find this Christmas bright with cheer and the blessings of warmth and benevolence. . . . To you -- our loyal customers and friends -- We wish a Happy Holiday!

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Under The Mistletoe

Here is a story with a touch of Christmas about it. What the well bred young lady was supposed to do in years gone by is set forth in an old book on etiquette published one hundred years ago. In the chapter on Christmas festivities the Editor found the following "Girls, although they be ladies, according to the mistletoe." According to the author, this was an old Druidic custom, and it is still happily in vogue. This green plant, with its waxen white berries, when hung over a doorway is supposed to permit only happiness to enter, hence the tradition of the kiss. It grows only as a parasite and in Europe is found most frequently on oak and apple trees, but it is not averse to living on poplars, willows, lime mountainash and maples. The white berries are delicacies to some birds, and through their agency the plant is propagated, the sowing is effected by the bird rubbing its beak, to which the seeds adhere against the bark of the tree on which it has alighted. The pulp soon hardens, affording a protection to the seed, which in germinating sends its roots through the bark of the tree and into the living tissues. The mistletoe, so popular in England at Christmas, is largely derived from the apple orchards of Normandy. The American mistletoe grows on deciduous trees, especially the tupelo and red maple, and is found as far north as the State of New Jersey.

No Christmas decoration, however, is complete without a sprig of holly that hardly shrub so closely associated with winter snow and cold. It is surprising to learn nevertheless, that holly thrives only in comparatively mild climates. It grows in England quite readily and ornamental hedges of it are common. In Canada it is grown chiefly in British Columbia. The

custom of using holly for Christmas decorations dates back to ancient times, and is generally regarded as a survival of the usages of the Roman Saturnalia or perhaps of an old Teutonic practice of hanging the interior of dwellings with evergreens as a refuge for sylvan spirits from winter cold. In old-country border provinces it is an old story-teller as one that "lees never but when the hollen is green." Several popular superstitions exist with respect to holly. In some parts of England it is deemed unlucky to introduce it into a house before Christmas Eve. The wood of the holly is very often hard and white like ivory and so it is popular with turners who will often in a contrary manner, dye it black in imitation of ebony and then use it for inlaying and for handles of metal teapots and walking sticks, etc. A curious habit noticed in the holly is that it will leave the upper part of the tree without protection, giving prizes only to those leaves which are near the ground. If no doubt considers it quite unnecessary, as well as a waste of energy, to give protection to branches which are beyond the reach of rabbits and cattle.

Among the Romans, holly was regarded as an omen of peace and goodwill, but in the language of flowers it means foresight. In old England the laurel, once in popular use for Christmas window decorations, has been replaced by the holly and the ivy. An old English song closes with these words. The Holly and the Ivy.

Now both are full well grown; Of all the trees that spring in wood The Holly bears the crown.

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