Mother Is Here

It was the day before Christmas. There were, however, no preparations—as far as anyone could see—in the home of the Noxons. Mrs. Noxon was in bed, in fact the bed had been her place of abode for some weeks. For the first two weeks she had been quite sick—very near pneumonia—and had had a nurse. At present she was very weak and nervous.

"What you need," the doctor had said, "is cheerful company and rest of mind. You worry too much, my dear Mrs. Noxon."

"Who wouldn't worry?" was her questioning retort, "with such servants as I have what is the comfort of living?" And, to tell the truth, there seemed no prospect of "rest of mind." As for "cheerful company," that was conspicuous by its absence. Mr. Noxon was at his office the greater part of the day, and when he returned home tired after a busy day, he, too, felt the need of "cheerful company." But he did not have it. The house was a lonely place nowadays. His wife's usual greeting was some recital of domestic vexation, and he often found her crying. His little children, Grace, aged five, and Bertram, three, were cared for at the home of a friend of the family. Mrs. Noxon could not endure the noise and confusion of children in her present condition. And yet on this day before Christmas her longing to see her children grew intense. Mr. Noxon had gone away the previous day "on business," but he would be back before Christmas. It was lonlier than ever with him away. Mrs. Noxon nursed her grievances al day long. She decided that life was not worth living. The doctor said that she should have nourishing food and plenty of it—well cooked. "It's easy enough for Dr. Swift to say things," was her discouraged thought when Betty brought in her lunch at one o'clock; "I wish he could see this."

"This" meant the tray of food. Betty, the waitress and chambermaid, had prepared the tray, and Sally, the cook, had prepared the food. There was a piece of beefsteak so rare that the blood ran out of it and yet the outside was badly scorched and black as the stove. There was some burned toast—floating in a sea of greasy looking milk and some lukewarm tea. To make the tray look still more uninviting, Betty had "slopped" the tea on her way to the sick room. The pepper and salt cups had not been properly cared for and Mrs. Noxon's napkin looked as if it might have done but in the kitchen. The woman who needed "nourishing food" took but one small taste of the burned steak.

She lay back on the pillow, weak and faint from want of food. During the afternoon she thought often of the coming Christmas and of the last one. Her own mother had died when she was too young to remember, but last Christmas her mother Noxon had been there, In fact her mother Noxon had lived there ever since their marriage, until there had been some hard words and then there was a parting. Mother Noxon had gone back to her lonely old home in the country.

"Martin has never been the same since his mother went away," she said to herself, sorrowfully; "he has always said she was such a good and devoted mother. He is an only child, Martin is, and his mother is a widow."

Over and over the words repeated themselves, "an only child and his mother a widow."

"It was more my fault than hers, anyway," she admitted to herself regretfully. "I wish I'd been more patient and less dictatorial."

She cried herself asleep. The short winter afternoon was drawing to a close when the slamming of an outer door awakened her. She sat up in bed, waiting, expectant.

"It must be Martin," she said to herself. "I'm glad he has come."

Presently she rang her bell peremptorily, and Betty appeared.

"Mr. Noxon came, did he not?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

Wondering why he did not come to her as usual, she asked where he was.

"It's awful cold and stormy out," was Betty's answer, "and I guess he wanted to get the chill off of him before he came in here. He's a warmin' himself in the hall."

A little later he entered the room. Kissing her, he said, "Merry Christmas, my dear!"

"Oh, you're too early," was her response, "besides there is no use in wishing me a 'Merry Christmas,' there's no hope of my having it," and there followed a recital of the day's worries ending with the description of the rejected lunch.

"It is too bad," he said, with ready sympathy. "I hope there will be something you can eat to-night."

"There will be nothing that will taste good," was her answer, but she was mistaken."

Not an hour later Betty came in with the tray. Mrs. Noxon looked at the girl in surprise at her neat appearance. Usually she was so careless about her appearance as to be a source of constant vexation, but now her hair was smooth, her white apron spotless and her maid's cap neat. She set the tray down on a small stand by the bedside and Mrs. Noxon looked at it as if fascinated. It was covered with a clean napkin, a second clean napkin lying on one side. The soup and teaspoons and forks and "pepper and salt" all shone. There was a lovely dish of pink china full of steaming oyster soup, the heart of a crisp head of celery, some dainty wafers, a pink china cup of hot tea, and on one side of the tray lay three beautiful carnations.

"Who sent it in, Betty?" she asked.

"No one," said Betty, "it was prepared right here in the kitchen"; and she smiled.

"Then mother is here," she cried out joyously. "I thought so as soon as I saw this tray. I recognized mother's touch."

Mr. Noxon appeared in the doorway. His face was aglow.

"Oh, Martin!" his wife said, "I know mother is here, bring her in."

"Eat your soup," he said, laughing, "and I'll hunt her up."

While he was gone she ate the soup, which was delicious. "It reached the right spot," she declared to Betty.

In another moment Martin came in with his mother, a sweet-faced woman, with capability beaming from every feature. Wife and mother met in a close embrace, after which the former said, "Then that was your business, Martin, to bring mother to us?" And he answered, "Yes, I couldn't have said 'Peace on earth' to-morrow if mother wern't here."

"Neither could I," said his wife.

Christmas dawned, the storm was over and the sun shining. Joy reigned at the Noxons. Little Grace and Bertram were home again, Grandma Noxon having declared that it would be a joy to look after them. There were gifts for all. As for the dinner with Grandma Noxon to superintend it, it could not be excelled.

Three years have rolled into the past since then, but no second break has come. Christmas again! The turkey is browning in the oven. The coal fires are dancing in the grates. Martin Noxon is walking (with his mother on one side of him and his wife on the other) up and down the library waiting for Betty to announce dinner. His right arm is around his mother, his left around his wife.

"The two best women in the world," he says joyously, 'and you are mine."

"If I am good," said his wife, laughing, "I think I must have turned from black to white that happy day three years ago when it suddenly dawned upon me that mother was here. It seems to me that I still smell those carnations and still taste the soup."

"Dinner is served," announced Betty.

THE STORY OF MISTLETOE.

It Grows Luxuriantly in All Parts of the World.

Least beautiful perhaps of all the Christmas greens, the mistletoe still holds a place peculiarly its own among the decorations of the season. Song and story have invested its unpretentious dull green leaves and its pearl-like berries with a glamor that is more appealing than the glory of the burnished holly leaves and its glow of scarlet fruit, and, although the wreaths of holly may brighten the windows at Christmas time and the trailing smilax make graceful festoons over pictures and mirrors, the mistletoe still holds first place.

The stiff little bunches that are sold in the city markets give little idea of the real appearance of the mistletoe as it was, when it was gathered from its parent tree, where it had found a home, after its first tiny embryo leaves shot out from the seedling dropped in some convenient cranny of the bark, by the birds of the air. The parasite, for mistletoe is a parasite, loves apple and pear trees, and once it gains a foothold will sap the life from the tree, but it is oftenest found in hardy oaks, where it grows in stout bunches, all gemmed over with the pretty berries. It is cosmopolitan in its habits, growing luxuriantly all through the south, abundant in Florida, and yet equally so in England and the Scandinavian countries.

It has long held a place in literature. School children learn of it first in connection with Druidical worship, and it figures prominently in Christmas stories every year. One of the oldest of the stories about mistletoe is in a Norse legend about Balder the Good. Balder had been very much troubled by foreboding of impending death, and his brother gods assembled to avert the danger by exacting promises from all the elements, from the diseases, the beasts, the poisons and the trees, that no one of them would do harm to Balder. After this they would amuse themselves by hurling things at Balder, and he was delighted to show them how free he was from danger.

He had an enemy, however, who was jealous of the mystical power which protected him, and one day this enemy set out to find out from the goddess Frigga the reason of all this. She told him that all things except one, a little shrub that grew on the eastern side of Valhalla, and which was too young and feeble to be noticed, had promised to spare Balder the Good. The enemy, Loki, upon hearing this, went at once, and cut off the mistletoe, and when next day the gods assembled for their customary play, Loki, the treacherous, placed the arrow he had fashioned from the mistletoe in the hand of a blind man, who could not know what it was, directed his arm for him, and Balder the Good fell pierced through and through.

"And do you always go out of town for Christmas, Benjamin?" Benjamin: "No, my dear; I generally go to escape it."

Christmas Dinner

Oysters.
Chestnut soup.
Roast turkey.
Browned potatoes. Mashed squash.
Cranberry sauce. Mixed nuts salted.
Deviled macaroni.
Salad.
Little plum pudding.
Ginger glace Cheese.
Coffee.

Oyster a la Dumas—Serve the oysters either as cocktails or on plates with a teaspoonful of the following sauce over each:

Chop a shallot, a teaspoonful of chives, a teaspoonful of parsley together and mix in a bowl with a tablespoonful of olive oil, two drops of tabasco, a teaspoonful of Worcestershire, a tablespoonful of tarragon vinegar, four tablespoonfuls of tomato catsup, and the juice of half a lemon. Add a teaspoonful of salt and a saltspoonful of white pepper.

Or the shallots may be cut up excessively fine and mixed simply with a little ground pepper a tablespoonful of vinegar, and the juice of three lemons.

Chestnut Soup—Peel and skin a half a pound of large, sound chestnuts, cook them in broth until soft, and then press through a sieve. Add to this puree the yolks of two eggs beaten and a pint and a half of cold broth.

Creamed Squash—Peel and divide a large squash into small pieces. Cook in well salted water and press through a sieve. Return the pulp to the saucepan, work in two or three ounces of butter and a little warm cream, beating like mashed potato.

Deviled Macaroni—Boil, blanch, drain and chop a half package of spaghetti or macaroni. Thicken one pint of cream or milk with a roux of flour and butter in the proportion of two tablespoons of each, and add to it one saltsoonful of Cayenne pepper and half teaspoonful of mustard. Add a tablespoonful of onion juice, a half tablespoon of salt, pour over the macaroni in ramekins, sprinkle the top with crumbs and brown lightly in the oven. This is served as an entree and is made more attractive by substituting a chopped sweet pepper for the Cayenne. Using cream instead of milk also makes it enough better to pay.

Salad—Mix apples and celery in proportion of one-fourth celery to three-fourths apples and add one chopped red sweet pepper. Dress and serve as usual.

Individual Plum Puddings—If the pudding is to be steamed use the small jars which have held extract of beef and steam for four hours. An easier way is to boil them in small baking powder cans or in molds procured for the purpose. Use a shallow iron kettle and let the water come within two-thirds of the top of the cans, keeping the kettle closed tightly. They will only need to boil an hour and a quarter when made as small as this, and should be raised on a trivet or a few nails laid in the bottom of the kettle.

Plum pudding to be at its best should be cooked in a cloth pudding bag and hung from a nail for three or four weeks in a dark place. An old English recipe is this: Soak six ounces of stale breadcrumbs in a cup of hot milk, and allow it to stand and cool. When cold, add one-half pound of brown sugar, the yolks of three eggs beaten to a cream, one-half pound of raisins seeded just before using, one-half pound of currants, two ounces of citron chopped, one-half pound of suet chopped fine and salted. The fruit should be well dredged in flour before adding to the bread. Now mix in two ounces of lemon peel, one-half a grated nutmeg, juice of one lemon, and two ounces of sweet almonds chopped fine. Beat well together, and, the last thing, add the whites of the eggs whipped to a stiff froth. Pour into a pudding bag which has been previously scalded and dredged with flour. In tying the bag allow for the pudding swelling. Boil seven hours.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

Once more the golden star that led
The wise men of the East,
Is seen of men; and softened hearts
Of king and prince down to the least,
Can hear the angel song again—
"Peace on earth, good will to men."

Once more the bars our selfish hearts
Build up against our fellow kind
Our idle hands of love take down;
And, wondering why our eyes were blind
We waken to the star that sets
To the heart only that forgets.

The star of love and charity;
The star that since creation's morn
Had languished for the hour divine,
Kindled by God when Christ was born,
Is ever shining in the skies
When we but lift our spirit's eyes.

How softly o'er the ways of men,
Like dew the arid sand,
Still falls in love the blessed light
That came o'er Jesus' natal land!
May the love lesson of this day
Dwell in our chastened hearts alway!

Decem: "Ginks had the most wonderful control of his features of any man I ever knew." Burr: "I understand he was a marvel." Decem: "He was. Why, I've even seen that man look pleased when he saw what his wife had bought him for Chrismas."

A Wise Turkey

NOW this turkey lived in a wildwood glen.
He was fat, and smooth, and sleek;
He had ne'er borne love for the haunts of men,
But he loved the little creek;
Yes, he loved the creek
And its water's play,
And the forest's leafy shade,
He was king of the chase,
And lord of the place.
Where the speckled eggs were laid.

IN the turkey tongue of his elder kin,
He had heard of the day of thanks,
And he hurried away as it wandered in,
To the creek's secluded banks.
And there on the banks
Of the little creek,
He thought with his thinking brain:
"I'm a gobbler now,
And one I trow,
Forever I will remain!"

SO he squat him down on a slippery log
That passed through the waters slow,
And he said, while his wattles were all agog,
"It's a risky thing, but all the same, you bet your life I go."
And he made a sail,
A tail-spread sail,
That carried him on and on,
To the land of the leal,
And the turkey's weal,
Where other good turks had gone.

AND all of the turks that stayed behind,
In the leafy wildwood glen,
Were caught by the men who were much inclined
To render thanks, and then
Their heads were cut off, their bodies filled,
Yes, with sage were their bodies filled,
And they helped give thanks
While the bells did peal,
But one gobbler was safe in the land of the leal.
For he'd left the little creek's banks.

Christmas in Bethlehem

The greatest of French historians has declared that every important event in the history of the world has sprung from the cradle of some new birth, and hence over every cradle the eye of love watches and the star of hope shines. On Christmas Day one name on every lip and in every heart—Jesus—and throughout all lands, multitudes will remember Bethlehem, beneath the Syrian skies, where the Saviour of mankind was born.

Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David, the home of Elimelech and Boaz, and the Ephratah in the history of Jacob, is scarcely more than a village in our own times, unwalled, with white stone house, situated in a pleasant and inviting country, six miles south of Jerusalem. Its population of 3,000 souls comprises Latins, Greeks and Armenians, in whose little town is built the Church of the Nativity, dear to millions of the Christian faith, covering the supposed site of Christ's birth.

If you were in Jerusalem, five miles from Bethlehem, when the sun's rays had sunk over western Judean hills, you would see on Christmas eve countless lights gleam from the small windows of the houses in Jerusalem's narrow, winding streets. Within these homes you would find women making earnest preparations for the Feast of the Nativity, before joining other pilgrims the same evening, on their way to the "hill city." Much as Eastern women delight in jewellery, yet on this special evening they lay aside armlets, bracelets, necklaces, and every kind of adornment, and clothe themselves in a simple white veil, in place of trinkets and highly colored dresses. Long ere midnight comes they join the throngs from their own and distant lands, approaching the hallowed soil of Christ's birth.

Nineteen centuries earlier wise men from the East travelled a part of the very same road (roads seldom changing their course in Eastern countries), following the bright star to Bethlehem's manger. On their route thither, says a legend, after being interviewed by Herod in Jerusalem, they lost the guiding star, and, went haltingly down the path to Bethlehem, until they reached a well, where they paused to water their animals. They were greatly troubled, but to their surprise and joy one of them noticed the image of a larger star in the water, and, looking heavenwards, he saw the star itself, which 'went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

On climbing the pebbled, stony hill, and entering Bethlehem, poor and decayed in appearance, not very clean or sweet-smelling, there is descried on the south side the dome of the Church of the Nativity, one of the oldest Christian edifices in the world. The Church of the Nativity, within the large square building of the Convent of the Nativity, is subdivided among the Latin, Greek and Armenian worshippers, to prevent rivalry or conflict, on what should be earth's most peaceable ground. Towards this structure, the pilgrim's from all quarters of the globe eagerly journey.

Travellers make their passage through the historic church and descend into the crypt where Christ's birth is reputed to have taken place. Here the walls are hung with bright, gaudy drapery and other hangings, amid which glistens a silver star inscribed "Hic de virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est" (Here of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ was born). The manger is in a low recess cut in the rock, reputed to have been an object of veneration and pilgrimage since the second century, A.D. Hither have toiled pilgrims for nigh on 2,000 years, who find it hard indeed to realize that they are gazing on Christ's birthplace. Yearly, tens of thousands in number, the pilgrims prostrate themselves, kiss the very stones again and again and shed tears in the world's most precious shrine of adoration. Many are the pathetic scenes witnessed. At the midnight hour of Christmas eve, when crowds have gathered in Bethlehem, the Latins celebrate the anniversary of the august event with a pomp and ceremony which never fails to impress the Westerns who may differ from their beliefs and mode of worship.

The view of the landscape also from Bethlehem's hill in the morning hours is one of unimaginable charm and attraction. "Far away," writes a traveller, "on the left we see the hazy outline of the blue mountains of Moab, stretching away on the other side of the Jordan. Occasionally we catch a brief glimpse of the Dead Sea, lying far below the ridge of rugged hills, its placid waters shimmering in the sunlight with a beauty that surprises the traveller, who associates the salt sea with gloom and death."

Remarkable to add, Bethlehem is the only place in all the world which celebrates Christmas three times each year. The Latins, or Romans, keep it on Dec. 25; the Greeks, twelve days later, and the Armenians observe the Feast of the Epiphany instead of Christmas; and, consequently, the pilgrims in Bethlehem on Dec. 25 are mostly of the Latin Church. In Bethlehem, the Bible city, the true home of Christmas, the celebrations are always picturesque and noteworthy, recalling the promise-laden words, "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel," and wonderfully has the word been verified that "the handful of corn upon the top of the mountains" shall cause the fruit thereof to shake like Lebanon.

The Nativity in Bethlehem has been represented by a host of great painters, and is the inspiring theme of a large part of Handel's noblest triumph, the "Messiah." The very title of Christmas bears a name which is above every name, while the years of the centuries are not dated from Calvary, but from the cave of Bethlehem. The child Jesus not only takes a place in history, but all history takes place in him.