

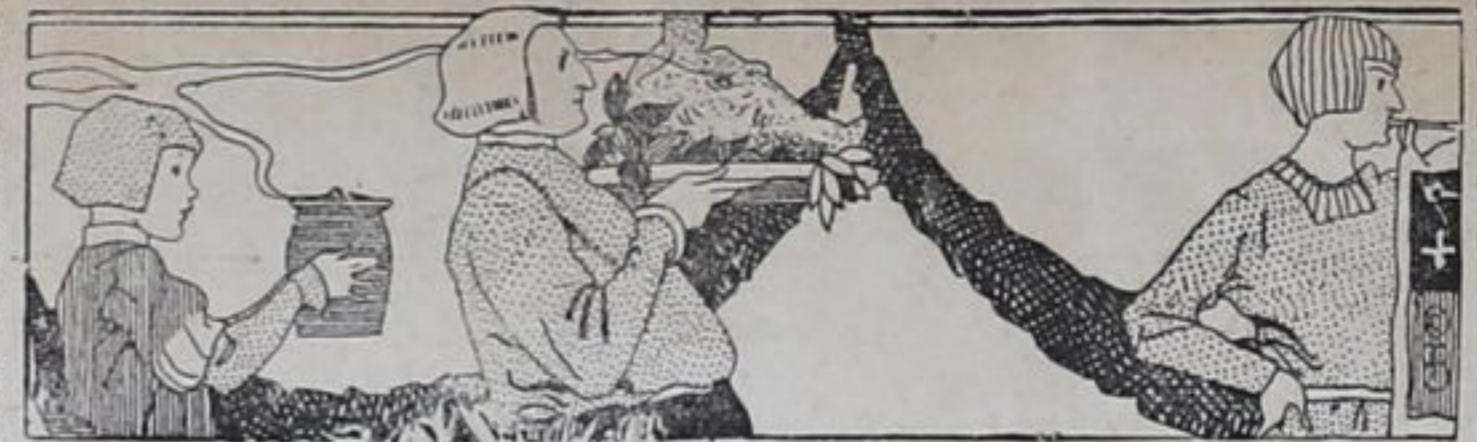
# The Christmas Symbol



**T**HOUGH you trace Christianity to its cradle in Bethlehem, you are not tracing Christ to His origin. He did not begin to be in Bethlehem. Never was there a time when He was not, but it was there in that cradle that He commenced to be manifested in that particular aspect. The anniversary of Christmas Day is its own sermon. It is like sandalwood, fragrant with inextinguishable memories of pathos, tenderness and love. Reason, and observation and inference and probability have in every age led

spiritually minded thinkers to expect a manifestation of God in human form on earth. The consciousness of right and wrong within them, what they themselves possessed of tender mercy led them whether they were Hindus, Zoroastrians, or Jews, to be certain that the author of that law of right and wrong, the source of that tender mercy, would not leave man in weakness and darkness to stumble alone, but in tender mercy he would visit them from on high. And Christmas Day is the agreed upon anniversary of the particular moment in human history when these aspirations were abundantly fulfilled.

The eternal reality underlying the human symbol of that Babe in its cradle does not lend itself to mathematical demonstration, or to verbal definition. But so far as we can express it in the poverty of human language, it is God assuring us out of the infinite silence that He is the everlasting friend of man, though we sometimes doubt it. It is God in tender mercy relieving our minds of the awful pressure of such unthinkable words as Immensity, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Boundlessness and the like, permitting us to think of Him as a Man, to love Him as a Friend, to trust Him as a Father. This unspeakably blessed revelation first touched the world on the first Christmas Day, and thus made the discovery of God appear possible to man. If the Incarnation were an immense and exceptional delusion we should have no concern with it, but simply to marvel that it should so have gripped the imagination of this weary world that for twenty centuries the delusion had added dignity to humanity, and illuminated its darkness with kindness and friendship. If it be, as we believe it is, an intense and unalterable, a transcendent truth, it becomes us to acknowledge, to appropriate, and to proclaim the boundless love and tender mercy that has been manifested.



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## Carols of Christmas

**I**N the matter of Christmas carols Mr. T. G. Crippen, an English authority on this fascinating subject, in "John O'London," points out the often-forgotten distinction between a hymn and a carol. A hymn is devotional; a carol is a popular playful and generally festive treatment of a religious subject, though, actually a carol need not be religious at all. Mr. Crippen points out that the earliest English Christmas carol, written in the Anglo-Norman dialect of the twelfth century, is "Lordlings, Christmas loves good drinking," which has no religious bearing. Many carols have been written for other seasons than Christmas, but these are neglected. Italy was the birthplace of the true carol, and Mr. Crippen holds that the actual originators were St. Francis of Assisi and his followers, who discovered that bright and homely songs went farther with the common people than sermons.

Mr. Crippen says that the oldest English religious carol dates from about 1410, but we have only this fragment,—

"I saw a sweet, a seemly sight:  
A blissful bird, a blossom bright,

That mourning made and mirth among;

A maiden mother meek and mild,

In cradle kept a knave child,  
That softly slept; she sat and sung,

Lullay lulla balow,  
My bairn, sleep softly now."

Here, of course, "knave child" means male child. There can be no doubt that during a long period the carol conveyed to the poor and ignorant a great deal more than the Bible. It brought the Bible to them through the ears, and in their own simple speech. Thus the following carol is purely scriptural, but it is also as easily assimilated as any popular song:

"To Bethlehem city in Jewry it was  
That Joseph and Mary together did pass,  
All for to be taxed with many-one-mo',  
"Great Caesar commanded the same should be so.

But when they had entered the city so fair,  
A number of people so mighty were there  
That Joseph and Mary whose substance was small,  
Could find in the inn there no laying at all.

Thus they were constrained in a stable to lie,  
Where oxen and asses they used to tie;  
Thus laying so simple they held in no scorn,  
And against the next morning our Saviour was born."

Another old carol quoted by Mr. Crippen thus describes the watching shepherds:—  
"About the field they piped full right  
Even about the midst o' the night;  
They saw come down from heaven a light;  
Tirle, tirle, so merrily the shepherds began to blow.

Of angels came a company,  
With merry songs and melody;  
The shepherds anon 'gan them espy:  
Tirle, tirle, so merrily the shepherds began to blow."

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## Best of All Yule Cheer

"It's great to be happy when everyone is,  
"It's great just to smile with the rest  
"But the real joy in the living  
Is the joy in the giving  
Of a much-needed handclasp—that's best."



"DEFENDERS"—A scene peculiar to Canada at Christmas and throughout the winter. The two sturdy young Canadians are defending the snow fort outlined behind them from the attacking enemy. They are well provided with ammunition, of which there is also an abundance all around them. With two such determined-faced heroes can anyone doubt as to the outcome of the engagement?—Taken from life.

## Celebrating Christmas

**C**HRISTMAS was first celebrated in the year 98, but it was 40 years later before it was officially adopted as a Christian festival; nor was it until about the fifth century that the day of its celebration became permanently fixed on the 25th of December. Up to that time it had been irregularly observed at various times of the year—in December, in April and in May, but most frequently in January.

## Holly Called Christ's Thorn

**I**NSEPARABLE in thought are the Yuletide and the red-berried holly that finds so conspicuous a place in the decoration of church and home; which tumbles out of great boxes at the entrance to the fruiterer's, and which adds the perfect touch to the Christmas plum pudding. Holly, which carries with it a special significance of good-will, was known in ancient legends as "Christ's thorn" to both the people of Denmark and Germany, while the Italians knew it as the "holy thorn."

Pagan Rome used holly in the great festival of Saturnalia, a holiday which preceded the present celebration of Christmas. Barbarous tribes of Europe, whose only bond in common was their allegiance to the Roman Empire, exchanged branches of holly as good-will offerings. Holly, which grows in many parts of the world, is said to be found in 200 varieties. The holly which in the earliest years was used to twine around the doors and posts of the homes of Merrie England was called the holly tree.

There is none more lovely than the Canadian holly, which grows in the woods of Ontario, and which, during the past few years, has been introduced into some of the florist shops of Toronto. A choice gift for the Yuletide is a Canadian-woven basket filled with the Canadian holly. Unlike the holly from the South, the holly branch found in the Canadian woods carries few leaves. A big bow of scarlet ribbon tied to the handle of the basket adds a real Christmassy touch to the basket.



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