

### Origin of the Christmas Tree.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful tree that sheltered the beloved Jesus and His companions. Often it had heard the simple precepts of the Master, and often had it rustled its leaves more loudly as the wind swept through them, making sweet music for the Divine One who rested beneath it. The tree learned of the goodness, mercy, love, and tenderness of this man, who became the representative for millions of people. It learned, too, in later days, of the hours of anguish, sorrow, and humiliation through which Jesus passed. One day the tree was torn from Mother Earth and borne away to be shaped into a cross.

"Alas!" said the tree, "whom must I bear in suffering?"

In a short time Jesus was led forth and the cross was given to Him, but as Eugene Field has most graphically told the remainder of the story, I refer you to him. Sad, indeed, is the recollection of the first Christmas tree, if this be an authentic legend; but the various tales are of a more joyous nature, as we modern people now regard them. Christmas is a festal season, recalling the birth of the radiant babe, most beautifully told in the New Testament.

Christmas is a joyous time, abounding in gifts and good cheer. Music and gaiety are in evidence, all the world, rich and poor, representing a happy season. Who originated the welcome festival?

All Christian nations claim its origin, but like many other things, we travel far back into the past and find curious coincidences of fir-trees, mistletoes and evergreens. All customs, however, are typical of birth, resurrection or renewed life. No doubt in America we are indebted to the German for the innovation as a public or popular feast. It has been said, some one saw a fir-tree forest covered with snow, over which sparkled myriads of stars, and that this man, a poet, an artist at heart-cut one down and carried it home illuminating it with candles. So many pretty stories have been told that it would take hours to

rehearse them all.

The Romans had been celebrating the Saturnalia feast for seven days, a period when all business was at a stand still, when courts and schools were closed, the law was suspended, and no battles were fought. Caste was abolished, slaves were the equals of their masters, who sat at meat with them. The children were not forgotten, as a special festival for them was given, wherein they received clay dolls, and where indeed, great joy prevailed.

Amid all this festivity of that year, January 7, B. C. 746, corresponding to our December 25th, when thousands were assembled, three wise men from the East arrived, saying they had been guided by a star, and had found a young babe in a manger, at Bethlehem, in Judea, where they prostrated themselves, bestowing on him frankincense, myrrh and gold, gifts suitable for a king. Consternation reigned, but it was useless to rebel, and the feast of Christmas was unalterably fixed, representing the birth of Christ. Thus were the revels of the Saturnalia festival changed into a reverent but joyful celebration of a day dear to all.

"On earth peace, good will toward men," a spirit of love, charity, forgiveness pervades, and, as in "Hamlet:"

"Some say that ever gainst that season comes

Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,

The bird of dawning singeth all night long;

And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad,

The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,

No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,

So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

### A Christmas Legend.

Most children have seen a Christmas tree, and many know that the pretty and pleasant custom of hanging gifts on its boughs comes from Germany; but perhaps few have heard or read the story that is told to the little German children, respecting the origin of this custom.

The story is called "The Little Stranger," and runsthus:

In a small cottage on the borders of a forest lived a poor laborer who gained his scanty living by cutting wood. He had a wife and two children who helped him in his work. The boy's name was Valentine, and the girl was called Mary. They were obedient, good children, and a great comfort to their parents. One winter evening, this happy little family were sitting quietly around the hearth, and snow and the wind raging outside, while they ate their supper of dry bread, when a gentle tap was heard on the window, and a childish voice cried from without: Oh, let me in, pray: I am a poor little child, with nothing to eat, and no home to go to, and I shall die of cold and hunger unless you let me in."

Valentine and Mary jumped up from the table and ran to open the door, saying: "Come in, poor little child. We have not much to give you, but whatever we have we will share with you."

The stranger-child came in and warmed his frozen hands and feet at the fire, and the children gave him the best they had to eat, saying: "You must be tired, too, poor child. Lie on our bed; we can sleep on the bench for one night."

Then said the little stranger-child: "Thank God for your kindness to me."

Then they took their guest into the little sleeping room, laid him on the bed, covered him over, and said to each other: "How thankful we ought to be. We have warm rooms and a cozy bed, while this poor child has only heaven for his roof and the cold earth for his sleeping place."

When their father and mother went to bed, Mary and Valentine laid quite contentedly on the bench near the fire, saying, before they fell asleep: "The stranger-child will be so happy to night in his warm bed."

These kind children had not slept many hours before Mary awoke and softly whispered to her brother: "Valentine, dear, wake, and listen to the sweet music under the window."

Then Valentine rubbed his