

That a young virgin should by divine interposition give birth to the babe of Bethlehem, seems to have been a sufficient license for a thousand inventions of the wildest fancy, and many are the simple and amusing tales gleaned from the unscrupulous story tellers of the earlier and succeeding ages. A popular tradition has it that Jesus was born in the middle of the night, and that an ox and an ass, in the stable with Joseph and Mary, fell upon their knees when the heavenly babe first opened its eyes. This, of course, is abundant authority for the belief so prevalent in England and many parts of the United States, that oxen in the stable may be found in a devotional attitude at 12 o'clock on Christmas eve.

It is said that, for many years, a hawthorne of great age, in the churchyard of Glastonbury Abbey, regularly budded on the 24th of December and blossomed in full on the following day. After the reformation of the Julian calendar and the adoption of the new style in England, this hawthorn bloomed on the fifth of January, answering to Christmas day, old style.

And now comes the romantic story of a nobleman in Flanders. This gentleman had three daughters of passing beauty and loveliness. Their spotless purity in thought, word and deed was proverbial throughout the country, but when they grew up to the estate of womanhood, the father was unable to give them marriage portions on account of a sudden and sweeping reverse of fortune. For young women in those days not to marry and bear children was little short of contumely, and the thought of it was dreaded by every maiden. Driven to desperation, the nobleman, now a beggar, basely proposed to his sorrowing daughters that they should adopt the profession of Cyprians; a proposition which was instantly and proudly declined. One evening, while the beautiful sisters were in their lonely chamber, bitterly bemoaning in each other's arms their double adversity of poverty and the world's calumny, the ever ubiquitous St. Nicholas caused three purses of gold to be tossed in their latticed window, and thus were they enabled to be honorably and happily married. Ever after this St. Nicholas was deemed the patron of young girls, and the legend

sufficiently explains the fancy of bride-maids putting morsels of wedding cake, rings, and other charms under their pillow, repeating, as they step into bed, such sentiments as the following:

"Take my votive boon to-night  
And show to me my heart's delight;  
While the stars of midnight gleam,  
Let me see him in my dream."

Finally, we must tell the children how good St. Nicholas also became their munificent patron. "Once upon a time," then, as the story opens, during a great dearth of food all over Europe, this pious man was traveling in England, and stopped at an obscure, wayside inn for a meal of victuals. He was hungry and faint, and a trencher of tender, savory meats was set before him. Suspecting that all was not right with the dish, he went to a great tub that stood in a dark corner of the room and discovered in the bottom the bodies of three murdered children packed in salt. Nothing daunted, the Saint made the sign of the cross over them and the children were instantly brought to life, much to the fright and horror of the wicked inn-keeper. Henceforth, St. Nicholas was revered by all good children and it has been permitted them to invoke his bounty on Christmas eve by hanging their stockings under the mantel of the fire-place.

But we cannot longer dilate, to all our readers young and old, we send greeting, fresh and warm from our heart, that cheery and sparkling salutation of the season, a MERRY, MERRY CHRISTMAS.

#### HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Often as these pleasant words are tossed from the lips of lover, relative and friend, we seriously doubt whether all who give them utterance ever stop to consider their real import. While the simple transit of three hundred and sixty-five days may be a small matter to each individual who plays his part in the great commonwealth of the world, how momentous its details when taken in connection with the sum total that comprehends the combined interest of the human race.

It has been estimated that our next census will fix the population of the United States at about forty million. This is a vast number of people, and quite enough to stock a respectable lit-

tle world of itself; and yet, on the assumption that one death occurs at every tick of the clock that bears a seconds-beating pendulum, more than seventeen millions of human beings, or a number equal to nearly one-half of our population have passed away during the twelve months represented by the denomination of the year 1879. All these persons have received a final discharge from the war of life, and gone each to his allotted niche in the shadowy realm of oblivion, there to rest until the sea shall give up its dead, and the earth, pregnant with the graves of a thousand generations, shall yield to the quickening spirit of Omnipotence, the reanimated dust humanity.

And now we may very soon look for the usual list of the "Eminent dead of the year," the printing of which is a custom beautiful in its conception and, so far as we know, peculiar to American newspapers. The history of the passing year lies open before us, free to the perusal of all who have a mind to scan its freshly written pages; that of the incoming year, however, whose gladsome event we fain would honor with song and dance, congratulation and good cheer, is a volume fast sealed, as yet, and only in the fullness of time shall we be permitted to read its solemn array of collated entries.

It may not be generally known that "New Years," as a day of festivity, dates back long prior to the Christian era. Such is the fact, however. Janus, the reputed gate-keeper of heaven, in Heathen Mythology, was charged with the business of ushering in the opening year, and, as a portal looks two ways, so was he represented with two faces, strikingly typical of the past and future. It was in honor of Janus that the month of January was so-called, and hence by an easy transition, the Romans paid homage to this god on the "Calends of January," in which all took an active part, the nobility as well as the plebeians and slaves. By tracing Roman history to a remote antiquity, we find that these celebrations were blended with the *Saturnalia* which took place on the last days of December, mention of the latter festivals being made so early as the age of Tarquinius Superbus, or about 500 years before Christ.

From Rome, the custom of celebra-