

Friends at Court

CLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR

- 24, Sunday.—Fourth Sunday in Advent.
 „ 25, Monday.—The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
 „ 26, Tuesday.—St. Stephen, First Martyr.
 „ 27, Wednesday.—St. John, Apostle.
 „ 28, Thursday.—The Holy Innocents.
 „ 29, Friday.—St. Thomas, Bishop and Martyr.
 „ 30, Saturday.—St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Widow.

The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

To-day the Church rejoices over the birthday of her Divine Founder—the Redeemer of mankind. The time appointed for the entrance of the Son of God into the world having arrived, Mary and Joseph were led by Divine Providence into Bethlehem. Failing to obtain admittance into the inns, they were compelled to take refuge in a grotto which served as a shelter for cattle. There Our Blessed Saviour was born to a life of poverty, humiliation, and suffering. He came to redeem the world, and to draw to Himself the affections of men, and, therefore, He presented Himself in the most amiable form that can be imagined—that of an innocent, helpless babe.

St. Stephen, First Martyr.

St. Stephen was one of the seven who were chosen to assist the Apostles in the daily distribution of alms, and who, by the imposition of the Apostles' hands, were raised to the Order of Deacons, and qualified to discharge some of the inferior duties of the sacerdotal office. By his zealous efforts for the propagation of the Gospel, he stirred up the hatred of some of the Jews, who stoned him to death. He thus had the honor of being the first among Christ's disciples to seal his faith with his blood.

GRAINS OF GOLD

THE INFANT KING.

They leave the land of gems and gold,
 The shining portals of the East;
 For Him, the Woman's Seed foretold,
 They leave the revel and the feast.

To earth their sceptres they have cast,
 And crowns by kings ancestral worn;
 They track the lonely Syrian waste,
 They kneel before the Babe newborn.

O happy eyes, that saw Him first;
 O happy lips, that kissed his feet;
 Earth slakes at last her ancient thirst;
 With Eden's joy her pulses beat.

True kings are those who thus forsake
 Their kingdoms for the eternal King;
 Serpent, her foot is on thy neck;
 Herod, thou writh'st, but canst not sting.

He, He is King, and He alone,
 Who lifts that infant hand to bless;
 Who makes His Mother's knee His throne,
 Yet rules the starry wilderness.

—AUBREY DE VERE.

Christmas is the sweetest festival of the year, one of the two that all Christendom unites in keeping. The festival of the Resurrection—which is the other—is the festival of a redemption into another life. Christmas is the festival of renewal of this life, the feast of the Child Redeemer.

The Incarnation and Nativity of Christ show forth the glory of His Father Who is in Heaven. The Son of God came down into a sinful world to manifest to men the attributes of the Father, and, in a special way, to make them realise the marvels of Almighty Power, Wisdom, and Love.

The Storyteller

CHARLIE GREEN'S GHOST

Now, look here, Charlie, it's all nonsense for you to talk like that. Why, such a thing is impossible in my house,' and Sir Roger Bentley looked righteously indignant. 'I tell you what it is, my boy, you must have gone to sleep lying on your back, or ate too much supper last night, and bad dreams were the result. Ghosts? Ha! ha! ha! What do you think of that, you fellows?' Sir Roger winked slyly at half a dozen men who made up the party in the smoking-room. 'Here's dear old Charlie Green making the very serious statement that he saw a ghost in the blue room last night. Isn't that so, Charlie?' and the hand belonging to fourteen-stone of Sir Roger fell heartily on the small space allotted to Charlie for a back.

'Oh-er!' gasped Charlie Green. 'Yes. I—I did really see a ghost. It was awful,' and he squirmed his back into position again.

'Rot!' said two or three laconically, while the others tried hard to smother their laughter.

'What was it like, and what did it do?' said his host from the window in a muffled voice.

'Oh, don't ask me! I shall never get over it,' he moaned, 'and—it's coming again!'

'Coming again?' they all ejaculated. 'How do you know?'

'By w—what it said,' quivered the thin voice.

'It was striking three when a terrible bloodcurdling noise awoke me with a sudden start. It was like the noise a dog makes when it's listening to a German band, or the steam syren of a tug. I sat up in bed without knowing it, and there, standing by the bedside, was the most fiendish spectacle you ever saw. Its eyes were large, and shot fire, and its cruel-looking face shone with the light of another world—but, I say, what's the matter with Freddy Vane?' and Green broke off in his recital to look wonderingly at a young man wriggling about on a couch with his head buried in a cushion.

In a moment or two Vane stopped his contortions, and looked up with disordered hair and flushed face. 'It's all right, Charlie,' he muttered brokenly. 'Don't mind me. It was the gh-grapes; they've given me the stomach-ache. I ate some a little while ago,' and Freddy assumed what he thought to be an expression of pain, but in reality it looked as if one side of his face had been stricken with paralysis.

Sundry coughs and blowing of noses sounded in the room as Charles resumed his narrative of the night's experience.

'Yes, I was frightened into utter helplessness. I could feel my hair going all curly, and I fully expected to find it white with the fright this morning, and it will be!' he cried, with his face in his hands.

'Come, Charlie, be a man, and finish your tale,' said Bentley's strong authoritative voice. 'Why should a ghost want to haunt you? Now if it were that rascal Vane there with his six feet of mischief I could understand such a thing, and he would deserve all he got.'

Steadying his voice, Charlie continued: 'The Thing looked at me with its piercing eyes, and came closer. All the time something kept running up and down my back, then I tried to hold up my hand to ward off whatever was coming, but like every other limb my arm wouldn't work. I thought I was going mad, when the silence was broken by a deep voice. Pointing a long finger at me, which also seemed aglow with a mysterious light, It said slowly, "You think you can see through me, but you cannot; I can see through you, though," and it was quite right, too! It was not like the ghosts you read about—transparent, and all that—but apparently came from another district where they thicken them.'

A long roar of resounding laughter greeted Charles' last words, and thankful sighs of relief were breathed at an opportunity of relieving pent-up feelings. Charlie stared at the outburst, but had no suspicions.

'What else did your precious ghost say, Charlie?' asked Sir Roger, when the noise had died away.