



The Christmas Train Ride

An unforgettable journey through time

Christmas Train Ride

--An Unforgettable Journey Through Time

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Dedication

I dedicate this book,
this journey through time,
to my beloved Emerald Isle.
May your hearts be warmed,
and Christmas cheer visit your
home each day of the year.

Until we meet,
Chariane Quille

Appreciation

A note of special appreciation and acknowledgement to *Carmel Conway*, for “going the distance” in taking the actual train ride and detailing the journey to make this book possible.
To you I am forever grateful!



Contents

Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1.....	8
Chapter 2.....	29
Chapter 3.....	54
Chapter 4.....	72
Chapter 5.....	90
Chapter 6.....	115
Chapter 7.....	140
Chapter 8.....	160
Chapter 9.....	181
Chapter 10.....	197
Chapter 11.....	214
Chapter 12.....	227
Epilogue.....	250

Introduction:

Enjoy this journey that takes you back in time with true stories telling of historical happenings, people and places—events that have occurred on or around Christmas, in days gone by. These have been woven together with a storyline involving fictitious characters, Eric and Sarah, and others.

I am adamant about clarity shown between truth and imaginary. For the benefit of the reader, the layout of the book makes the distinction clear between fiction and fact.

Fictitious elements have a grey backdrop, all the rest is fact or historical, or an actual event and happening, or was based on some true happening, experience, or conversation—even if at times it's expressed through the mouth or actions of fictitious characters.

It's a book that you might like to pick up while relaxing at the end of a day; or, as it's studded with factual and interesting information, it can be used for educational study; it can be delved into for reading as a family, especially over the year-end holidays; the inspirational content included makes it suitable as devotional material that will enhance the life quality of the readers; the true historic events and the people's lives it reveals makes it a fascinating study that is of a character-building nature.

I've chosen to have the story take place in Ireland, as my heart holds a love and fondness for you, each one there in my beloved Emerald Isle. I pray for a time when peace on Earth and good will to all men will spread over the land, just as the greenery covers the land; and when joy will spring in the hearts of each one, as flowers blossom in spring.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1

The holly wreath on the door and a welcoming candle shining from the window gave Sarah a beckon. A smile played on her face as she had at last reached the very spot her mind had taken her to time and again.

It had been five long years of searching, researching, and following all kinds of leads. Some more helpful than others. At last here she was.

It was nearly Christmas day in Dublin, Ireland, and a tingle of hope played in her heartbeat as she prepared to enter the house of a lady who knew something that might be a key piece in the puzzle Sarah was trying to put together.

Could this really be happening? she wondered. But the response to her gentle knock came quickly to assure her indeed it was.

“Oh, do come in!” Melinda invited, and the two were soon engaged in casual talk near the hearth.

Though soft spoken and somewhat reserved, Sarah was in actuality, taking it all in, down to the last detail, without restraint. She was here for one purpose alone.

After the usual greetings and expected light conversation, Sarah roused her courage to ask the question she had come to ask. Waiting for the right pause she drew a breath and glanced out the window at the now falling soft snow, and then,

“Melinda,” she began.

“There’s just one thing I must know. Who was Mr. Macgilpatrick? To you, that is.”

It seemed time stood still after these ice-shattering words cut through the superficial air of small talk.

Melinda looked down, fingered the buttons on her skirt and was deep in thought. Then a tear stole across her cheek. Bravely she quickly wiped it and got up to pour tea for the two of them. Her throat had a lump and it took a while until she found her voice and could begin to answer the question.

Where would she start?

Quietly and expectantly Sarah sipped her tea and adjusted her lap blanket.

Since they both had time, Melinda decided that to start at the beginning was the best place. Though the story in itself wouldn’t be long, to be sure. And that indeed was some of what caused heartache and mystery.

“It was a wintery day, much like it is now, when he first walked into my life. I was 18 at the time, and hadn’t a clue what my life would blossom into. I can’t say I was looking for anyone to lead me on into the better years of life. But there he was. I never really got out of him much about his home life or history, where he’d come from, or what he was really up to,” Melinda said with hint of a smile.

“But I got as far as knowing that I genuinely liked having him around. He seemed to take a liking to me, too, you know, though we really didn’t spend much time getting acquainted.”

“Then it happened. All of a sudden, or so it seems, my heart was captured as a fish in a net, with love. I had a thousand emotions wrapped up in him. I scarcely could go a moment without thinking about him.

“In my mind I already had a family together with him, and we’d settled down for a long happy life with our children and grandchildren. That is until a cold splash of reality woke me up fast. Almost as suddenly as he had come, he was gone.

“Who was he? Only God knows. Would I ever see him again? Time will tell. I had years left until I was ready for such a life of commitment and devotion, anyway. Crushed and heartbroken I made my way through my studies, and on my life unfolded.”

Sarah asked incredulously, “But didn’t he tell you anything, or say goodbye? He must have given you some clue, after all, you were a friend to him. Surely he would miss you, too.”

“Aye, he did leave something; but no matter how oft I’ve looked it over, I can’t make out its meaning.”

Getting up from her seat Melinda opened a locked music chest and pulled out a piece of canvas.

Sarah joined her and studied over the canvas inscription.

“Until next time. –E.M.”

Returning the treasured item to its place, Melinda confided: “Much as I try, I want to move on. I’m old enough now to have a family of my own, but something in me holds

me back. I don't know what to do. Five years is a long time to wait, to hope. My mind tells me it is, yet my heart tells me to hold on yet a little longer."

Sarah nodded sympathetically and returned to her seat. Then a twinkle glimmered in her eyes. It was a wild chance, but worth the try. Sarah threw out another question to Melinda who was still deep in thought.

"This year I will spend Christmas, and on until the new year, with my grandmother. I need somewhere quiet to think. See, well, it's a bit hard to explain, but I think you will find it rather curious for you personally.

"Well, let me tell you plainly. I'm writing a book of a most fascinating nature. I think you won't be disappointed nor find it dull. There is much to be discussed—or rather much to be discovered. Please, if you don't have any other constraints, I would like to extend to you the invitation to join me there."

Melinda is taken by surprise, although somewhat puzzled by this rather cryptic offer and further more doesn't see how this ties in with what they were just communicating about. Yet she is intrigued and glad for a diversion over the holidays.

"I'll phone you tomorrow about travel plans, and thanks for your time," Sarah says extending her hand to enfold Melinda's as she says goodbye. "I'll have some preparation to do, so I think I best be off."

Melinda nods and soon sees Sarah disappear out the door into the whitening surroundings.

“Curious. Most curious,” Melinda ponders. Yet as she then busies herself with holiday preparation and packing she can’t help but feel somewhat light-hearted, nearly giddy.

“Christmas joy must have arrived—almost as sudden and intriguing as the guest I just had over.”

That night, Eric tossed and turned in his bed. It wasn’t just the cold that had made him feel restless.

“Ah, how can I get back... how can I get back to see her lovely face again...!” he was saying.

“If only my Uncle didn’t snore so loudly in the room next door, I might have slept longer!” Eric pined. He turned on the light to see it was 2:00 AM. The party the night before had gone on till half-past 11. Thankfully, he fell asleep rather quickly, but now his night was troubled.

“It’s dreams like this that make the loneliness of the season all the more pronounced—or rather waking up from them to see my solitary life, is really the problem.”

Eric got up and poured himself a glass of water, washed his face and decided to take some time to write Christmas cards, to the ones who still preferred the mailed version. He could post them on the way to the train the next day.

After an hour or so of writing and reading, he at last switched off the light and crawled back into bed to get some rest.

Solid sleep never came, but he managed a doze here and there amid his racing thoughts.

“Why are dream-friends always the nicest? It seemed more than a dream, though I know it wasn’t. It was like the dream was months long! We spent so much time together. How I wish...” his thoughts trailed off as he fell one more time into a short doze. But it was long enough to do just what he wanted to end the dream with. Eric saw the lovely young lady and handed her a note written on whatever he could find to jot it on, with the hope that they would meet again.

When morning finally arrived, Eric’s spirit had picked up. “I like that ending better,” he thought. “And this time I remember the lady’s name, I think, something like “Linda” which means ‘beautiful’. How appropriate.” Eric then pulled himself out of bed and treated himself to a good hot shower.

Mentally, he went over the list of things to finish before leaving to board the train:

--Pack his wallet, ID, cell phone and charger, some food and drink, and a small blanket into his backpack

--Drop Christmas cards into postbox

--Say goodbye to his parents in the nursing home and bring them a Christmas gift

--Pick up some food treats to take to his Aunty and Uncle, with whom he would be staying for the holidays

With these tasks completed, as he walked to Colbert Station he whistled merrily along with the carollers that were singing while walking down O' Connell Street. He was at last on holiday and was glad! He'd chosen to take his break away from Limerick and spend the remaining days of the year in Dublin.

Though just doing something different and taking some time off was a great way to end the year, nothing especially exciting was planned. However, surprises wait around the corner at Christmas, and this one would prove to be his most memorable yet.

The morning was cold, dark and damp, as most Irish December mornings are. Eric waited to purchase his ticket at the box office in Limerick's Colbert Station as he didn't bother to book online as there were always seats available.

“That was odd,” he thinks to himself. “Just as I was coming up to the station it seemed the scene changed, just for a fraction of a second, like a flash of a picture.

The station building was pretty much as it looks now with its stone arch doorways, however, instead of cars in the parking lot, there were horses and buggies all neatly lined up, waiting to take people—like taxis would. The clothing people were wearing in that scene was from another time in history for sure.”

He saw women with fancy hats, white long-sleeved blouses tucked into skirts that nearly reached the ground, and white-gloved hands. The men dressed in coats and caps and trousers, along with boys who dressed much the same,

though rather than pants, their shorter knickers were tucked into the long socks they wore that came nearly up to their knees.

“It was like for a second I was back in time 150 years; back when it was still called, ‘Limerick Train Station.’” Originally named "Limerick", the station was given the name Colbert on April 10, 1966 in commemoration of Cornelius Colbert. It opened on August 28, 1858, replacing a temporary station 500m further east, which had operated from May 9, 1848, running its first train as far as Tipperary.

Eric’s thoughts were pulled back to the bustling reality of the train station. There were many people, young and old rushing for this train. Any children he saw were dressed in warm furry coats and mittens, like children from a Dickensian novel. It brought back happy childhood memories. Many of the grown-ups were commuting to Dublin for work but others were red faced with excitement at the thought of Christmas shopping in Dublin.

Though Limerick has lovely shops, there's a novelty in visiting Dublin for Christmas shopping in places such as St. Stephen's Green, Shopping Centre and Arnott's. However, Eric wasn't going for the shops, but rather he wanted to tuck away for awhile in the quaint neighbourhood where his Aunt lived.

Just then Eric spotted his Uncle Ned and younger sister Elizabeth, who had come to see him off before walking over to the Bus Eireann. They'd be catching a bus for their own vacation excursion. After saying goodbye and promising to bring back something special for Elizabeth, he was on his way.



Limerick Railway Station



(Photos contributed by Carmel Conway)

Before boarding the main train, he along with many others would need to pack into a small commuter train which would stop at Limerick Junction. This train station was opened in 1848, and was originally named "Tipperary Junction", but some years later it was changed to "Limerick Junction". Once there, Eric would depart from the commuter train and board the main train for the rest of the journey to Dublin.

Although Tipperary town was not Eric's main destination, to pass the time while in the commuter train he looked over a pamphlet he'd found lying around. It must have been left by a tourist. It described the area he was soon to arrive at. Photos of horse races as well a picture of the large, grey Holycross Abbey, illustrated the information:

"Tipperary town is approximately 3km to the South East of Limerick Junction. It could be described as a small hamlet, consisting of pretty railway cottages and, of course, a pub. Over the years, larger stores and businesses have moved to the towns land of Limerick Junction, bringing with them bigger and more architecturally modern homes and buildings, but it's still quite small.

"Limerick Junction is mostly known for its Racecourse. County Tipperary is rich in equestrian history and home to the famous Coolemore Stud. There are so many beautiful and interesting places to see and learn about in Tipperary, such as, the magnificent Glen of Aherlow, which is shadowed by the breathtaking Galtee Mountains. There's also Holycross Abbey and the Rock of Cashel, which was the seat of the Kings of Munster. Both the Abbey and the Rock of Cashel date back as far as 1100 A.D."

As Eric departs the small commuter train, he says a quick prayer to himself, asking the Almighty to send the connecting train to Dublin as soon as possible. The wait would be cold. As lovely as the spirit of Christmas joy is, the wet and cold of the Irish winter season must be braved or rather endured.

It can seem that Ireland has just two Seasons: Spring and Winter, but with more rain than snow in the Winter. But if one is tempted to be critical of its wet weather, they can remember that it is what gives the landscape its lush beauty and the country its "forty shades of green".

"We won't be waiting long," Eric says to himself as he rushes to the glass shelter on the rather bleak platform of Limerick Junction. It looks quite desolate, though Eric notices a brave-hearted young lady has kept up her festive mood and is sporting a bright red coat. It contrasts well with the cloudy, damp and breezy weather these travellers are standing in. But though its bleak through the Winter times, as the Spring approaches so too will the beautiful wild flowers which will sway and bend in the gentle breeze of the mellow Irish Spring.

Eric watches as the other waiting passengers try to keep warm using whatever brings them some comfort. Mothers are retying scarves and searching for lost mittens, rubbing the cold little hands of their, still excited, children.

"Oh, thank God. Here comes the train..." Eric and the others say inaudibly.

As he boards the train at Limerick Junction, he and the others are relieved to be out of the damp weather. This train is fuller but a lot more comfortable, and Eric finds himself a nice seat by a window so he can enjoy seeing the countryside along the way. Eric arranges his belongings, settles in, and prepares for the relaxing ride he hopes to enjoy.

“Good thing I brought a wee blanket in my pack. This chill is enough to frost my bones,” Eric thinks, rugging up and looks briefly out the window.

Eric remembers that the next stop is the Thurles station. It was built in 1848. Though one can't see much of the town from the train, he remembers that, as a young child, his parents would sometimes go shopping there with him and his sister.

Eric is brought to the present moment again as he overhears the conversation taking place beside him. Seems a middle aged man is very pleased to be at last having his lovely French fiancé visit his neck of the woods. He describes in detail the place of their destination; the place he grew up in. She seemed just as pleased to listen as he was eager to talk. The man carries on with,

“Thurles, or Durlas, in Gaelic, means Strong Fort of Exile or Strong fort of the Fogarty's of Exile. The Fogarty's were a clan who dominated regions of Templemore, stretching as far as the Tipperary and Kilkenny border.

“Thurles was an agricultural market town and has developed into a retail town which has many very well-known multinational retailers and of course, family

businesses, such as McKeivitt's, 'Cost cutters', and so forth. Thurles is the birthplace of *The Gaelic Athletic Association* or The G.A.A., which is a huge part of Ireland's social and sporting culture. It was founded in 1884.

"There are many other places to see in Thurles, not least, the magnificent *Cathedral of the Assumption* which stands in the centre of the town.

"It has a Romanesque architectural style with its facade modelled on that of Pisa. Building of the Cathedral began in 1865 and has beautiful features such as 'The Rose Window', magnificent altar, and free standing Baptistery. The Tabernacle is actually the work of Giacomo Della Porta, who was a pupil of the wonderful Michelangelo."

The gentleman paused to take a breath, and Eric turned his attention to notice the others around him on the train. He gathers from what some older women are saying, they are going to Dublin not just for shopping, but to enjoy the novelty of having their hair done in a "highbrow" salon. The ladies have arranged to meet afterwards for lunch and a warm drink.

This reminds Eric that he had packed something to eat. He bites into one of the tomato sandwiches that he brought with him for the journey, and sips on a lovely hot cup of tea from the flask he also brought from home.

Eric looks out the window at the passing landscape, then turns as he notices the elderly gentleman that is sitting opposite of him, with his wife, stand up. The gentleman walks toward two well behaved children, and gives each child a little snack.

"Say thank you", their mother prompts them, and, of course, they did so very politely.

It was a simple but kind gesture which makes one realise that these modest, unplanned, simple and kind gestures are what the spirit of Christmas really means.

Eric feels cosy now and is beginning to get drowsy as he finishes the last sips in his cup. Feeling the gentle rumble of the train and its slow rocking motion seems to put him in a relaxed and dreamy state.

There would be plenty of time, thought Eric, to catch up on some lost winks while on this ride. His night had been short, and so was the charge left on his cell phone. "Better send some 'well-wishes' and Christmas greetings to friends and family while I've still got time left on my phone, then it's time out—to sleep, before yet the next seasonal activity."

But that is when things started to go a little strange.

He suddenly felt rather dizzy and so closed his eyes briefly and took some deep breaths. Maybe his busy year was catching up with him. Thinking he'd only shut his eyes for moment he opened them to turn on his phone to complete his last seasonal duty—Christmas e-cards.

"How odd..." Eric was puzzled. "The phone's on, but there is nothing happening. No email box; no way to get online; no programs or apps; nothing."

That's when he noticed something yet more unusual.

"What on Earth is going on here?!"

He was suddenly sitting on an office chair at a desk with an ancient looking computer and monitor. “Whoah! I didn’t know these kinds of things still existed.” There were orange letters and words and codes on a black screen, and the computer had no USBs port but rather a slot for a large floppy disk. It seemed this one was one of the special, mega-space computers, boasting it could hold up to 100 Megabytes!

“Some dream I’m having! Better than just sitting on the train anyway,” he mused while taking in the surroundings. Just then his quiet moment was broken by joyful screams and cheers. A group of people were gathering to share a bottle of champagne.

“It worked!! It really worked!!” they were saying.

“Congratulations, Tim Berners-Lee!”

“And a very merry Christmas to you, Robert Cailliau!”

Two men were shaking hands. Their tireless work over the past many months had paid off.

From what Eric overheard, he had pieced together what was going on. These men and the others helping them had at last proven it was possible to connect to a server using a web browser on another computer. The work however, was far from over. Years of work lay ahead in order to materialize Tim’s dream of international communication and information sharing via computer.

But this day was a memorable one in bringing the worldwide web, the internet, a step closer to people all over the world.

Eric saw a calendar on the desk stating it was December 1990, and all the days were marked off up until Christmas day.

“Wow, it’s Christmas day already—and sometime in the past. I must be more exhausted than I realized. This is some dream. But that would explain why I couldn’t send any Christmas emails,” he said looking at his phone. No internet set-up in existence!”

Tim, who people were congratulating, seemed to have a great sigh of relief written on his face, and people seemed much too engaged in their joy to notice Eric.

For a moment Eric wondered how he could quietly slip away without being questioned as to his presence there, but as he sat looking casually at the calendar the numbers changed right in front of him. First the “9” on the “90” flipped upside down, and then the zero doubled and made two small circles stacked one on top of the other. It now read: 1968.

That’s the last Eric remembered from his dream, as the sounds on the train called him back to consciousness. Or so he thought.

“Wait a minute?” Eric said aloud in surprise.

“I thought I was ON a train, not beside one, in a train station! Where are my bags, my things? And what on earth am I wearing?” He looked down to see the floral patterned bell-bottom baggy pants he had on, platform shoes, and an old jean jacket, somewhat stained.

“Who am I? What am I? Where am I? And more importantly, how can I get to where I need to go? By the looks of things around me, this is anything but a quaint town in Ireland!”

“Hi, I’m Heather—but you can just call me whatever is cool,” a young woman about his age sat down with him. “Looks like you need a lift, wanting something that will send you as high as the moon.”

“No, thanks, Heather, just feeling a little out of place, that’s all. Need my mind turned on, in a real way. Besides, I’m already on a trip,” Eric turned away, half chuckling at his own joke, and watched as the train moving on the tracks was now nearly out of sight.

Heather then said, “Come, they say there’s some food over there. Some dude has taken to giving out free grub every now and then for us poor folks’ supper. Won’t be your ma’s cooking, but it’ll get you by.”

Not knowing what else to do, Eric followed Heather to the spot where sandwiches were being passed out, along with a gospel tract of some sort. Eric accepted both, thanked the man and returned to sitting on the ground. Heather choosing to keep him company sat snugly beside him on some gunny sacks, and proceeded to quietly read the paper the kind gentleman had given them in the dim light. She then summed it up, aloud:

“Says the Big Guy Upstairs will welcome us to a banquet, when our scene down here is through—a banquet party that even many rich and famous, hoity-toity folks have turned down.



*Free entrance granted to the biggest, most divine banquet, for those who request
it from the Big Guy Upstairs, by asking His Son for permission.*

“I’d love to go! Wouldn’t you?” Heather said as a far off wistful look came into her eyes, followed by a tear.

“Sounds like something my mother would tell me... She’s gone now...” Heather looked over at Eric, who had finished eating.

“She’s with the Big Guy now,” he said, while putting his arm around Heather. It seemed the thing to do, as she was in need of comfort.

“Well, does that paper you read tell the way to the party? Don’t think any of us struggling folks down here wanna miss out. At least I don’t,” Eric encouraged her to think on something positive.

“Yea, here it is. Says something about the Guy’s Son coming to Earth to grant us free entrance, if we’ll just accept it, believe it’s true, and love Him for it. Guess we could give it a try?” Heather said, feeling a bit better.

So there, together, Eric and his new found friend looked up at the nearly half-moon and Heather said,

“Dear God, we don’t know what to expect once this life here is done for, but we’d like to think that something good is going to happen. We’d love to be accepted by You, and these words say that we can be if we love and trust in Your Son Jesus.

“We know we’ve each done wrong; no one here is ever perfect, and so we can’t really expect You’d want us hanging around Up There. But if there was some way You could see past our wrongs, and forgive us for each thing that has made You sad, we’d love You forever.”

Eric added, “And God, I don’t really know what brought me here, or how I got on this most unusual train ride, but I know that this moment feels right. I somehow feel in my heart that You’ve moved some of my own stuff out of the way and made a spot for Your love. And I think it’s cool.”

With that, Heather realizing she must get going, said, “You know, I’m glad we met; and if time ever brings us together again that’d be neat. Until next time, Goodnight.”

“Until then,” Eric said.

A smile was on his face and a joy filled his heart. Here he was, somewhere out who-knows-where, with people he didn’t know from Adam, yet Christmas cheer seemed to reach him right where he was.

Once Heather left, Eric lay back to gaze at the brightening moon in the darkening sky. He was feeling rather light; so light that he felt he could fly to the moon, or at least float up—in fact he was sure he was beginning to do just that.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2

“Wait a minute? Could this really be happening? What’s going on now?” Eric was once again unsure of his suddenly changed surroundings when all of a sudden the moon he had been gazing at began to appear much bigger than he’d ever seen it before. And not only that, but the view of planet Earth from his new perspective was breathtaking.

“I am floating! I can even do flips in the air... that is until I bump into... the wall—of a space vehicle!” he said, taking in the new aesthetics.

Then he heard, “Merry Christmas, Jimmy and Frank!”
“Same to you, Bill!” they responded.

Could these really be the crew on the first manned mission to orbit the moon, in 1968? Am I in the presence of the famous astronauts: Commander Frank Frederick Borman, Command Module James Arthur Lovell, and Lunar Module Pilot William Alison Anders?

Eric then stayed quiet and seemed unnoticed and invisible as the three proceeded to do a live television broadcast from lunar orbit. It was their Christmas Eve message to Earth, and in it they showed pictures of the Earth and the Moon up close.

Jim then said to all, “The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth.”

Eric heard the crew end the broadcast by taking turns reading from the book of Genesis. It seemed right to do so. Christmas was a special time to ponder special things—like the passage of when the Earth was formed by God; the Earth they now had the rare privilege of seeing from a whole new angle, as a complete globe in the sky. After all, they had to trust they were in the hands of God now as they orbited in space, and hoped to make it home safely.

William opened up the Bible and began to read:

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the Earth. And the Earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.”

Jim continued with:

“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.”

Frank concluded the reading with:

“And God said, Let the waters under the Heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.”

Then Frank added, “And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night. A Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you—all of you on the good Earth.”

“I must say,” Eric thought to himself, “This is one far-out place to spend Christmas Eve—circling the moon 10 times now!”

The atmosphere changed within the craft, however. The joy of Christmas switched to serious focus. If the crew was to make it back to their loved ones before the year ended—or even at all—the next stage of the trip, the Trans-Earth Injection (TEI), would need to occur without failure to the Service Propulsion System (SPS).

This stage was scheduled for 2 ½ hours after the television transmission. The TEI was the most critical burn of the flight. Any failure of the SPS to ignite would strand the crew in Lunar orbit, with little hope of escape.

The crew was now above the far side of the Moon, and out of contact with Earth. Were they really on their own? Though they seemed so far away from those on Earth, they liked to think that the God who formed the Earth, the Moon, the laws of gravity, and the whole of space, was carefully watching over them just then.

Apollo 8 Team 1968



Though none on Earth could hear them or communicate with them, the One who made them could hear and answers their faintest whisper for help.

Eric was unsure of what his future held—and how long he was to remain, albeit invisibly, with this brave crew, spending Christmas where no one else ever had. He drifted in and out of sleep, waiting, listening, praying, and hoping all would go according to plan.

Though he knew history, that on the 27th of December the crew made their splash down in the Pacific, 1,100 miles southwest of Hawaii; still he was living the moment along with them. They didn't know what was to happen, and Eric had no way to communicate to these somewhat apprehensive astronauts that everything would turn out all right. Besides, it was probably all a dream, for Eric anyway—and who knows what might happen next!

Days passed and then it happened. They braced themselves for the “grand finale”. Travelling at an enormous speed, this pioneer team could do nothing now but hold their breath and pray until this powerful trip home landed them with a splash! They'd gone from one extreme to the other—from moving up in space to being nearly still somewhere out in Pacific Ocean. The one thing in common: both places were far from good solid ground. What was to happen now? Did anyone know where they were?

Eric looked around and noticed first of all the stillness, but then realized that all was well. Bill, Jimmy, and Frank were safe and sound. Thankfully their entrance to planet Earth was indeed noticed, as was evident by what followed.

Eric watched as a helicopter came to escort the astronauts up, up and away to where they would be formally and royally welcomed back from their challenging, and most usual, Christmas in space.

These men had given themselves as gifts to the country—living gifts; willing to study, to learn, to practice and to endure all the discomforts of living in a compact gravity-free condition, without the assurance that they would most certainly come back.

It was a wild and brave venture. But through it, and the success of the mission, they had given hope to the nation and to the world, that exploration beyond the confines of the globe we are privileged to call home, just might be possible.

During the exchange of passengers at the Thurles train station, Eric opened one sleepy eye as he had been stirred from his most engaging dream. When he saw all was well, he rearranged his blanket and drifted off again in sleep. However, in a moment as he turned to get comfortable he found himself in a hammock in a ship's cabin, and the air he was breathing seemed very cold. The ship however was stationary. When Eric opened his eyes to see his breath, he noticed a large thermometer on the wall reading minus 23°.

A few hearty, "Merry Christmas" greetings were bellowed by the arctic explorers he now found he was among. A cold but most curious Christmas was about to be spent with these brave arctic explorers headed by Robert E. Peary.

These men had their sights on making it to the North Pole, and now were among a crew of sailors aboard a ship that wasn't going anywhere. You can't sail on ice! The ship SS Roosevelt was under the command of Captain Robert Bartlett. It was wintering near Cape Sheridan on Ellesmere Island.

Though Eric felt groggy he wanted to rise and look around. A splash of cold water on his face would be just the thing. The men had a supply of water—rather than just ice—due to the help of some Eskimos.

They had sounded and found water. Over the hole in the ice they built a snow igloo with a light wooden trap-door, so as to keep the water in the hole from freezing too quickly. The water was brought to the ship in barrels on sledges drawn by the Eskimo dogs.

Eric enjoyed a jovial and most entertaining Christmas day of 1908. Thankfully, he had been thought of as one of the crew and had seamlessly participated in each event.

As Eric was going to retire for the evening he passed the room of Mr. Peary, who by the light of a lantern was faithfully writing out his journey log.

Mr. Peary wrote, detailing the splendid day, of Christmas 1908, for many around the world to hear about, one day:

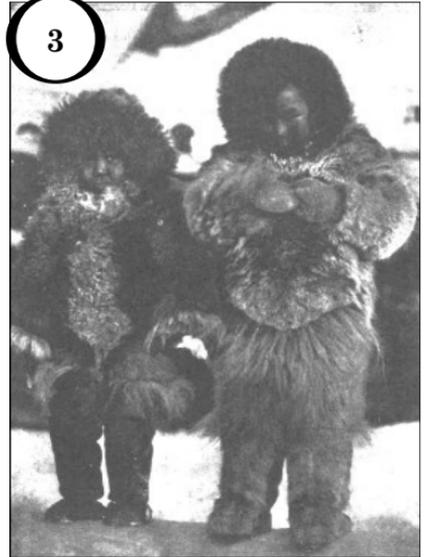
“At breakfast we all had letters from home and Christmas presents, which had been kept to be opened on that morning. MacMillan was master of ceremonies and arranged the program of sports.



1

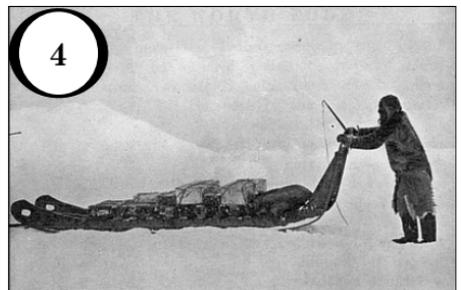


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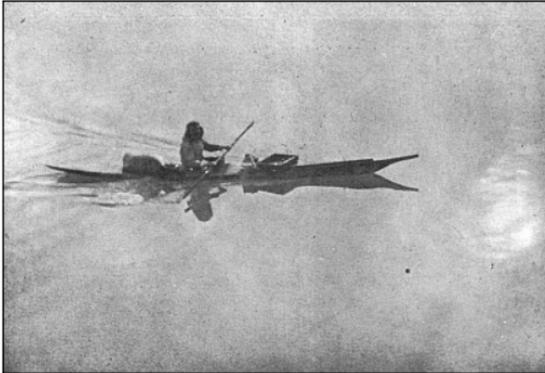
1—THE ROOSEVELT DRYING
OUT HER SAILS AT CAPE
SHERIDAN, SEPTEMBER, 1908
2—PORTRAIT OF ROBERT E.
PEARY, IN HIS ACTUAL
NORTH POLE COSTUME
3—ESKIMO CHILDREN
4—TYPE OF SLEDGE



4



DECK SCENE ON THE ROOSEVELT



ESKIMO IN KAYAK



VIEW OF THE EXPEDITION ON THE MARCH IN FINE WEATHER

“At two o'clock there were races on the ice-foot. A seventy-five-yard course was laid out, and the ship's lanterns, about fifty of them, were arranged in two parallel rows, twenty feet apart. These lanterns are similar to a railway brakeman's lantern, only larger. It was a strange sight—that illuminated race-course within seven and a half degrees of the earth's end.

“The first race was for Eskimo children, the second for Eskimo men, the third for Eskimo matrons with babies in their hoods, the fourth for unencumbered women.

“There were four entries for the matrons' race, and no one could have guessed from watching them that it was a running race. They came along four abreast, dressed in furs, their eyes rolling, puffing like four excited walruses, the babies in their hoods gazing with wide and half-bewildered eyes at the glittering lanterns. There was no question of cruelty to children, as the mothers were not moving fast enough to spill their babies.

“Then there were races for the ship's men and the members of the expedition, and a tug of war between the men aft and forward.

“Nature herself participated in our Christmas celebrations by providing an aurora of considerable brilliancy. While the races on the ice-foot were in progress, the northern sky was filled with streamers and lances of pale white light. These phenomena of the northern sky are not, contrary to the common belief, especially frequent in these most northerly latitudes.

"It is always a pity to destroy a pleasant popular illusion; but I have seen auroras of a greater beauty in Maine than I have ever seen beyond the Arctic Circle.

"Between the races and the dinner hour, which was at four o'clock, I gave a concert on the æolian in my cabin, choosing the merriest music in the rack. Then we separated to 'dress for dinner.' This ceremony consisted in putting on clean flannel shirts and neckties. The doctor was even so ambitious as to don a linen collar.

"Percy, the steward, wore a chef's cap and a large white apron in honor of the occasion, and he laid the table with a fine linen cloth and our best silver. The wall of the mess room was decorated with the American flag. We had musk-ox meat, an English plum pudding, sponge cake covered with chocolate, and at each plate was a package containing nuts, cakes, and candies, with a card attached: "A Merry Christmas, from Mrs. Peary."

"After dinner came the dice-throwing contests... The celebration ended with a graphophone concert, given by Percy.

"But perhaps the most interesting part of our day was the distribution of prizes to the winners in the various contests. In order to afford a study in Eskimo psychology, there was in each case a choice between prizes.

"Tookoomah, for instance, who won in the women's race, had a choice among three prizes: a box of three cakes of scented soap; a sewing outfit, containing a paper of needles, two or three thimbles, and several spools of different-sized thread; and a round cake covered with sugar and candy.

“The young woman did not hesitate. She had one eye, perhaps, on the sewing outfit, but both hands and the other eye were directed toward the soap. She knew what it was meant for. The meaning of cleanliness had dawned upon her --a sudden ambition to be attractive.”

(Text and photos from *“The North Pole--Its Discovery in 1909 under the auspices of the Peary Arctic Club”* by Robert E. Peary)

The ring of a cell phone aboard the train pulled Eric into a semi-awake state. As he continued to doze off and on, he listened to the low murmurings of the passengers all around. He caught bits and pieces of phone conversations and heard others who were reading, turning pages of books.

Eric then sat up and looked out the window to see rolling fields of green with some cattle standing like statues, chewing the cud. Inside he pondered about what he’s privy to hear while travelling by train:

“It’s always surprising to me to see how many people complete work and conduct business deals over the phone on trains. They seem to forget that everyone can listen to what, it would seem, should be conversations held in the privacy of an office. Just goes to show how removed from our surroundings we can become with laptops, mobiles, etc.”

The train soon pulled to a stop at the Templemore station. Though a large crowd was waiting to board, Eric notices that nobody departs the train.

He turned to speak to the elderly lady passenger beside him, voicing aloud, “By the time we get to Dublin, we'll be packed in like sardines!”

To which she replied with a nod, “A common and unfortunate occurrence at this time of year—the Christmas rush.”

Eric decided to at last send those Christmas card emails. Curiously, the phone and internet seemed to be working as good as usual. He chalked up the malfunction previously due to his tiredness and that it simply was a dream. After sending them promptly, before his power supply was exhausted, he sat back to catch some of the scenery and chat with a passenger about the next upcoming stop: Ballybrophy.

From his conversation he gathered some tidbits about Ballybrophy station: It was opened in 1847 and is situated near the towns of Borris in Ossiry and Rathdowney; there is a large old water tower there; and the Gaelic word for Ballybrophy is “Baile Ui Bhroite”.

When the train came to a halt at the station, Eric stood up to stretch a bit during the 10 minute wait before departing once again.

He saw a paper being passed around between a group of friends; it seemed amusing. When Eric noticed that each one had taken a turn with it, he indicated he'd like to have a look too. It was a selected compiled list of interesting things that had occurred down throughout history on Christmas day.

SOME HISTORICAL CHRISTMAS DAY EVENTS:

1 - 1st Christmas, according to calendar-maker Dionysus Exiguus.

352 - 1st definite date Christmas was celebrated on December 25th.

597 - England adopts Julian calendar.

1223 - St Francis of Assisi assembles 1st Nativity scene (Greccio, Italy).

1492 - Christopher Columbus, Explorer of the New World, aboard his flagship the Santa María.

1582 - Zealand/Brabant adopts Gregorian calendar, yesterday was December 14th.

1599 - The city of Natal, Brazil, is founded.

1621 - Gov. William Bradford of Plymouth Colony (now in Massachusetts) forbids game playing on Christmas.

1643 - Christmas Island founded and named by Captain William Mynors of the East India Ship Company vessel, the Royal Mary.



1651 - Massachusetts General Court ordered a five shilling fine for "observing any such day as Christmas".



1741 - Astronomer Anders Celsius introduces Centigrade temperature scale.



1758 - Return of Halley's comet 1st sighted by Johann Georg Palitzsch.



1777 – Captain James Cook sailed north, to explore the north-west coast of America. On December 24th he discovered and named Christmas Island.



1814 - Rev. Samuel Marsden of the Church Missionary Society holds the first Christian service in New Zealand on land, at Rangihoua.



1818 - "Silent Night, Holy Night" - "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" first sung (Austria).



1831 - Louisiana and Arkansas are first states to observe Christmas as holiday.



1832 - Charles Darwin celebrates Christmas in St Martin at Cape Receiver.



1928 - Christmas Day attendance at cricket MCG (Vic vs NSW) 14,887.



1937 - Arturo Toscanini conducts 1st Symphony of the Air over NBC Radio.

1968 – Apollo 8 astronauts broadcast and Christmas reading while orbiting Moon.

1989 - Japanese scientist achieves - 271.8°C, coldest temp ever recorded.

1990 - The first successful trial run of the system which would become the World Wide Web.

2004 - Cassini orbiter releases Huygens probe (which successfully landed on Saturn's moon Titan on January 14, 2005.)

2013 – Authorities discovered an incomplete tunnel connecting Hong Kong to China.

2015 – A rare full moon on Christmas (It happens about every 19 years; but it's rare to fall exactly on the 25th of December. The last one occurred in 1977.)

Eric found it amusing and interesting, then passed it on. He had smiled a bit and shook his head as he read that point about the Saturn exploration, and the Huygens probe landing on one of Saturn's moons, Titan.

He wondered if it proved a bit of an embarrassment for those hoping that information gathered could be used as evidence that Saturn (and the entire Solar system) was not only very old but somehow just came into being on its own, a very, very long time ago. Rather the opposite happened.

Everything discovered laid solid proof bare that Saturn, its rings, its moon Titan and its other moons are actually young and fairly newly created. Coincidentally, Eric had a magazine in his bag that he was returning to his uncle, which contained an article on that very topic.

Eric liked reading about those brave enough to explore and move past "comfort zones" to discover reality; those who don't compromise their inner conviction of what they know to be right, merely to gain the approval of others and a fatter pocketbook. —For example: David Coppedge.

David Coppedge was a team lead in charge of computers for the Cassini mission. He put his all into working in his field of expertise at JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratory); they likewise benefited from his quality work for years.

David also enjoyed learning about a wide range of science information and discoveries, and wasn't one to keep the great facts shared by scientists and others, to himself. From time to time he loaned nature and science-related DVDs to his co-workers.

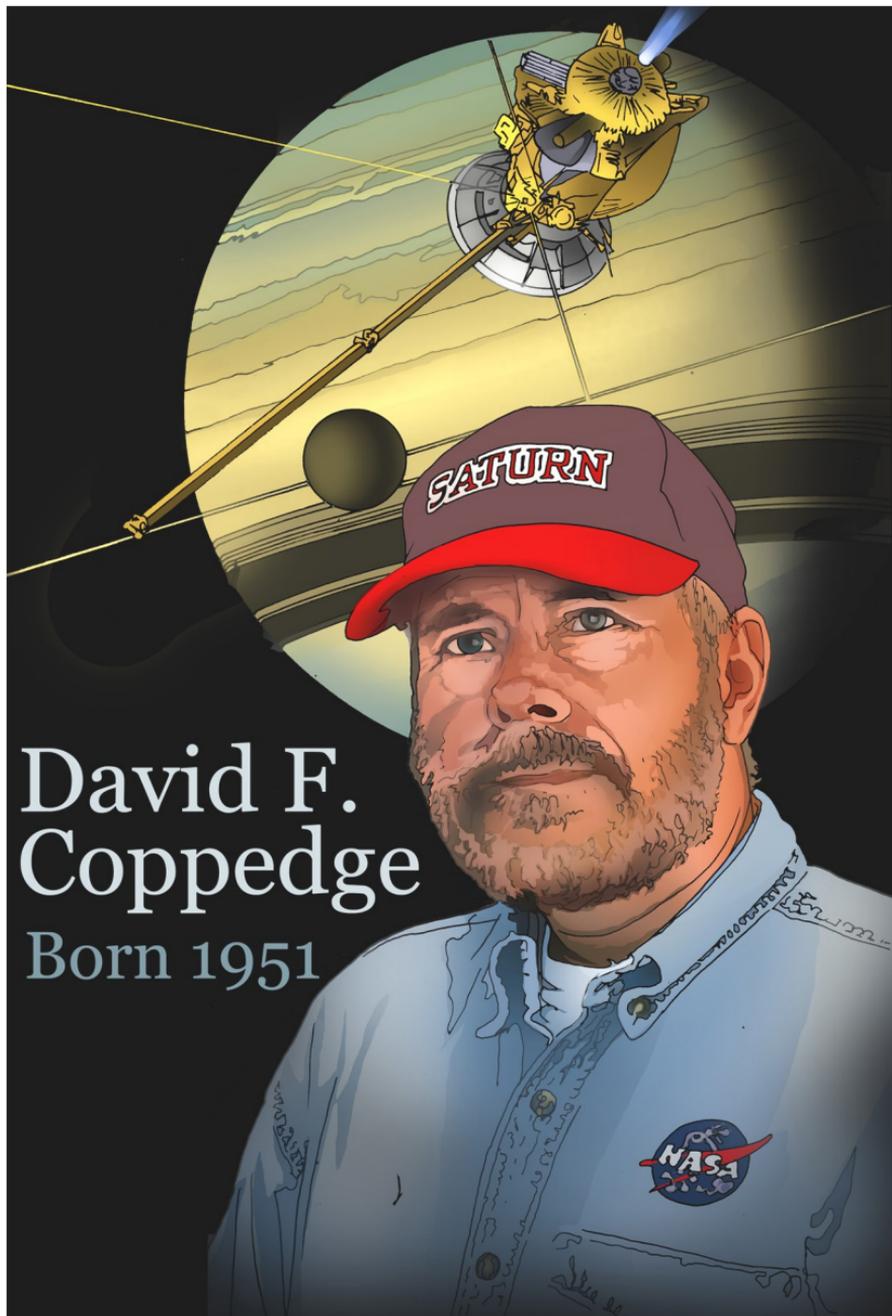
Thinking they would be just as fascinated as he was with the documentaries—and some of them were—David had no idea that doing so would eventually cost him his job. To his surprise he found out that passing on information that hinted or talked of the world’s formation and creation coming into being due to “Intelligent Design”, was against an unwritten law; a crime deemed worthy of punishment.

As strange as it is, he was demoted and “let go” of his position of team leader, and then his job as well. As puzzling as it seemed, other teammates were allowed to express any theory or belief—or lack of one—that they wished; in fact whole mission sectors could be devoted to finding “intelligent life” somewhere in space, on distant stars and planets. But not him, not there, especially if David, as well as his father’s scientific studies and discoveries led him to believe, and rightly so, that there was intelligence involved in our own planet’s existence.

And if that wasn’t enough to get him “fired” by those trying to hush up everything that points to the God who made us all, David even dared to ask why the programme changed the name of their annual “Christmas party” to “Holiday Party”.

Eric mused, “So you can’t have even a ‘Christmas party’ if you are a scientist these days—at least one that wants to remain on a big payroll that is.” He shook his head incredulously.

Pulling the magazine out, he read over the article again, by David Coppedge, titled: Young Saturn.



David F.
Coppedge
Born 1951

“In his symphonic suite *The Planets*, Gustav Holst titled the 5th movement ‘Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age’.

“In his symphonic suite *The Planets*, Gustav Holst titled the 5th movement ‘Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age’. In human terms, a few thousand years would be pretty old, but secular scientists claim the planet is much older—about 4.5 billion years. Cassini, the spacecraft that orbited Saturn from 2004 to 2007, has made that age hard to believe. Independent lines of evidence argue for a much younger age.

“Cassini-Huygens is the most advanced outer-planet spacecraft ever launched. In the 14 years I worked on the mission, I had opportunity to hear firsthand the struggles the world’s leading planetary scientists were having trying to keep Saturn old. I heard the predictions before launch, and I monitored the realities as torrents of data came in from Saturn, its moons and rings. Here is a short list of phenomena that put strong upper limits on the age of the Saturn system. None of these delicate rings seem likely to persist for even a tiny fraction of the lifetime of the main rings—and the main rings already look young.

“Enceladus. As reported in the June 2009 issue of this magazine, Enceladus emerged in 2005 as a serious challenge to old-age claims. This little moon, about the diameter of Arizona, was erupting water ice, dust and gas out of its south pole in powerful geysers.

“In March 2011, the problem got more and more difficult for long-agers: the heat emitted from Enceladus was measured at 15.8 gigawatts—ten times higher than earlier estimates. Papers in 2007 and 2008 admitted there is

no known combination of factors that can keep this activity going for billions of years. The eruptions on Enceladus are indeed fountains of youth.

“Main Rings. Saturn’s rings are not the placid, smooth raceways they appear to be. They are dynamic! The rings are constantly being bombarded by the solar wind, sunlight pressure, gas drag, internal collisions and micrometeorites. Scientists have even heard ‘ring tones’ in radio frequencies coming from meteorite impacts, and the visible ‘spokes’ may be their signatures. Yet the ice is remarkably clean compared to the predicted contamination from billions of years of micrometeorite pollution. And scientists recently found the trail of a billion-ton comet that must have hit the rings in the 1980s. How rare was that?

“Scientists have struggled to keep the rings old by suggesting that the ice gets recycled somehow, or that the rings are more massive than they appear (this only prolongs the life of the B ring, the densest one). Most ring scientists, however, are resigned to the fact that the rings look young. To maintain their faith in billions of years, some propose that the rings formed long after Saturn by some lucky accident. Such an ad hoc explanation would require highly implausible conditions.

“Faint Rings. In addition to the visible rings, Saturn has 1) a tenuous F ring continually plowed by Prometheus, one of the shepherd moons, 2) some fragile arcs in the G ring, 3) a newly-discovered Phoebe ring orbiting Saturn backwards and 4) the tenuous E ring, created by the 10% of particles that escape Enceladus. On approach to Saturn, an ‘explosion’ in the E ring was detected (probably from

Enceladus), dissipating as much mass as all the ring's micron-sized particles combined in just four months. How often does this occur? If not rare, it represents a dynamic, destructive process. None of these delicate rings seem likely to persist for even a tiny fraction of the lifetime of the main rings—and the main rings already look young.

“Saturn. Saturn has incredibly strong lightning storms, aurorae, a phenomenal vortex at its south pole that could almost swallow Earth, and a bizarre hexagon-shaped pattern of clouds at the north pole. Saturn's magnetic field, furthermore, defies evolutionary dynamo theories by aligning nearly perfectly with its spin axis.

“The magnetosphere was even found to be loaded with charged particles from the Enceladus geysers, which in turn affects the field's rotation. It's remarkable that such a tiny moon has produced a measurable affect on a planet with 5 million times more mass—talk about the tail wagging the dog!

“Iapetus. The Texas-sized moon Iapetus is as black as charcoal on its leading hemisphere, and as white as snow on the trailing side. This difference in brightness (albedo), noted by discoverer Jean-Dominique Cassini in 1672, left Voyager scientists still mystified in 1981.

“The mystery was finally solved by the Cassini mission, but what a solution! Close-encounter photos taken in September 2007 showed that the dark material almost certainly came from outside the moon; but even more astonishing, there's a runaway migration of bright carbon dioxide ice due to heat absorbed by the dark material around it. This irreversible process causes the carbon

dioxide 'dry ice' to sublimate and 'hop' to the trailing side and from pole to pole.

“About 12% of the migrating ice is lost to space each 29.5-year Saturnian orbit. Even if Iapetus started with a layer five kilometres (three miles) thick, it would be gone in just a third of the assumed 4.5 billion-year age of the solar system.

“Another puzzle on Iapetus is a mountain range circling most of the equator that rises, at some points, 19 km (12 miles) above the surrounding plains. Trying to explain that in evolutionary terms requires an improbably rapid spin-down of Iapetus, or maybe a ring that collapsed. Rhea, a similar-size moon, shows scars on its equator that might be from ring collapse, but nothing as massive as the mountains on Iapetus.

“Titan atmosphere. Like Earth, Saturn's moon Titan has a largely nitrogen atmosphere, but unlike Earth, it has a large component of methane (what we call 'natural gas' on Earth). This methane provides Titan with a 'space blanket' that keeps the nitrogen in a gaseous form. But the methane in Titan's atmosphere is irreversibly lost to space and to the surface.

“Since Voyager, atmospheric scientists have known that the solar wind is eroding the methane, converting it to hazes and other compounds that cannot change back to methane. When that erosion depletes the methane to a critical level, the entire nitrogen atmosphere should freeze out and collapse onto the surface catastrophically. Clearly, this has not happened.

“Titan surface. The solar wind ionizes atmospheric methane, causing it to recombine into other hydrocarbons, primarily ethane (C₂H₆). The ethane, which is liquid at Titan temperatures, should have rained down and accumulated over 4.5 billion years into a global ocean several kilometres thick, according to calculations made in the 1980s. The Huygens probe, however, landed in January 2005 with a thud on a moist lakebed. The historic landing provided ‘ground truth’ that the old-age predictions were wrong.

“The project orbiter and lander found Titan girdled with dunes of dirty ice particles, riddled with river channels, but only scarred with half a dozen craters—astonishing for a large moon. Lakes were found in the north and south polar regions, but the largest one in the south was recently caught evaporating quickly, now that Saturn is moving from equinox to solstice. Cloudbursts of methane witnessed last year show weather cycles that have not left evidence of billions of years of hydrocarbon deposits.

“These and other evidences put strong upper limits on the age of the Saturn system. ...”

(Selections from article, as appeared in Creation magazine, Volume 33, Issue 3, July 2011; found at <http://creation.com/young-saturn>)

Eric, feeling in the mood for reading more on the topic of brave discoverers, was glad he’d come prepared with a good book in his bag: *Journeys in Persia*.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3

The mint tea steamed from Eric's thermos cup, as he sipped and pulled out an old and interesting book he'd brought to pass the time: *Journeys in Persia* (By Isabella L. Bird). The final chapter was of her trek over mountainous terrain near Armenia, in icy weather, in December 1890).

On the 13th she sat down to journal, with detailed descriptions, what she had just experienced in her adventurous travels of the previous two weeks.

Eric read:

"I left Erzerum on the 2nd of December, escorted by my kindly hosts as far as Elijeh, having an Armenian katirgi, who in every respect gave me the greatest satisfaction, and the same servants as before. The mercury fell rapidly the following night, was 2° below zero when I left Elijeh for Ashkala the next morning, and never rose above 15° during the whole day. The road follows the western branch of the Euphrates, the Frat, a reedy and winding stream.

"The horsemen and foot passengers were mostly muffled up in heavy cloaks with peaked hoods, and the white comforters which wrapped up their faces revealed only one eye, peering curiously out of a cavern of icicles. Icicles hung from the noses and bodies of the horses, it was not possible to ride more than half an hour at a time without being benumbed, and the snow was very deep for walking.

“After crossing the Euphrates twice by substantial stone bridges, I halted at Ashkala, a village of khans, at a clean but unfinished khan on the bank of the river, and in a room with unglazed windows and no possibility of making a fire experienced a temperature of 5° below zero. My dinner froze before I could finish it, the stock of potatoes for the journey, though wrapped in a fur cloak inside my yekdan, was totally spoilt, and my ink froze.

“The following day was cloudy and inclined to snow rather than frost, and the crossing of the much-dreaded Kop Dagh was managed without difficulty in five hours, in snow three feet deep. There is a refuge near the summit, but there are no habitations on the ascent or descent. It is a most dangerous pass, owing to the suddenness and fury of the storms. ...

“The Kop Dagh, 7500 feet in altitude, forms the watershed between the Euphrates valley and the Black Sea, and on such an afternoon as that on which I crossed it, when wild storms swept over successive mountain ranges, and yet wilder gleams lighted up the sinuous depression which marks the course of the Frat, the view from its lofty summit is a very striking one.

“It was dark when I reached the very miserable hamlet on the western side of the Kop, and as earlier caravans had taken up the better accommodation, I had to content myself with a recess opening out of a camel stable. The camels sat in circles of ten, and pleasant family parties they looked, gossiping over their chopped straw, which, with a ball of barley-meal dough in the morning, constitutes their slender but sufficient diet.”

At this point, rather than merely reading of the event described, Eric seemed to walk right into the story.

Eric shivered as he entered the rough shelter he finally found after a long and cold camel ride.

“Well, if Christmas means a stable, I’ve certainly arrived at it.” Eric thought aloud, then added, “Only, thank goodness it wasn’t this cold during the First Christmas. Deciding to celebrate Jesus’ birth in December was chosen hundreds of years after His arrival. I tend to think it was likely an attempt to change the focus of the year-end celebrations to something of a more Godly nature. It helped—at least for quite awhile. Nowadays, however it’s less about “Joy the World, the Lord has come!” and is more about “Decking the halls with bows of holly”, buying and selling, and “Jingle Bells”.

With that thought about bells, decorations and commerce at the end of the year, he seemed to hear the story now being read aloud to him, picking up where he left off, while pacing in the freezing camel stable:

“Nothing gives a grander idea of the magnitude and ramifications of commerce than the traffic on the road from Erzerum to Trebizond. During eleven days there has scarcely been a time when there has not been a caravan in sight, and indeed they succeed each other in a nearly endless procession, the majority being composed of stately mountain camels, gaily caparisoned, carrying large musical bells, their head-stalls of crimson leather being profusely tasselled and elaborately decorated with cowries and blue beads.

“The leader of each caravan wears a magnificent head-dress covering his head and neck, on which embroidery is lavishly used in combination with tinsel and coloured glass, the whole being surmounted by a crown with a plume set between the ears. There is one driver to every six animals; and these men, fine, robust, sturdy fellows, are all dressed alike, in strong warm clothing, the chief feature of which is a great brown sheepskin cap of mushroom shape, which projects at least nine inches from the head.

“The road is a highway for British goods. The bales and packing cases are almost invariably marked with British names and trade marks. The exception is Russian kerosene, carried by asses and horses, of which an enormous quantity was on the road.

“I was glad to leave Kop Khané at daybreak, for caravan bells jingled, chimed, tolled, and pealed all night, and my neighbours the camels were under weigh at 3 A.M.”

Eric stirred and awoke from his momentary nap. He wrapped his blanket around himself tighter and picked up the book that had fallen. He tried to find where he was up to, but picked up reading at a part that seemed interesting.

“The sky was grim and threatening, and the snow deep, and when after a long ascent we descended into a really magnificent defile, so narrow that for a long distance the whole roadway is blasted out of the rock, a violent snowstorm came on, with heavy gusts of wind.



Isabella Bird
1831-1904

“There were high mountains with a few trees upon them dimly seen, walling in the wildest and most rugged part of the defile, where some stables offered a shelter, and I was glad to be allowed to occupy the wood house, a damp excavation in the mountain side! No words can convey an impression of the roughness of Asia Minor travelling in winter!

“It was lonely, for the stable where the servants were was a short distance off, and the khanji came several times to adjure me to keep the bolt of the door fastened, for his barley was in my keeping!”

Right at the line that she then wrote, *“I fell asleep, however...”*, Eric suddenly found himself within the wood house, as Isabella described, and lived the next dramatic part along with her; if she could have seen him, she might not have felt so alone.

“...but I was awakened at midnight by yells, shouts, tramlings, and a most violent shaking of my very insecure door.”

Eric nearly jumped! What was he to do? Had he arrived on the scene to be her hero?

However, there was nothing to fear, as he found out.

“It was the Turkish post, who, being unable to get into the stable, was trying to bring his tired horses into my den for a little rest! Fine fellows these Turkish mail riders are, who carry the weekly mail from Trebizond into the interior. ...They dash up and down mountains and over plains by day and night, changing at short intervals, and are only behind time in the very worst of weather.”

Eric looked out of the little wood house to see the continued whiting of the ground as snow fell, then he slumped to rest for what was left of the night. By early morning he saw Isabella and her team set off on the next part of their journey, in the falling snow.

Eric stood outside the shed to see this brave team of travellers carry on their way, until too cold and a sneeze shook him—awake on the train back in Ireland.

After a handful of nuts, a glass of water and an orange, Eric picked up the book again, to find out what would happen on the trip he just saw her take off on—in his drama dream. It was fascinating! He felt like he really was there; maybe he had been, in some mysterious way. Who knows?

“Snow fell heavily all night, and until late in the afternoon of the following day, but we started soon after seven, and plodded steadily along in an atmosphere of mystery, through intricate defiles, among lofty mountains half-seen, strange sounds half-heard, vanishing ravines and momentary glimpses of villages on heights, fortress-crowned precipices, suggestive of the days of Genoese supremacy, as in the magnificent gorge of Kala, and long strings of camels magnified in the snow-mist, to the Kala village, with its dashing torrent, its fine walnut trees, and its immense camel stables, in and outside of which 700 camels were taking shelter from the storm. We pushed on, however, during that day and the next, through the beautiful and populous Gumushkhané valley to Kupru Bridge, having descended almost steadily for five days.

“The narrow valley of the Kharshut is magnificent, and on the second day the snow was only lying on the heights. The traveller is seldom out of sight of houses, which are built on every possible projection above the river, and on narrow spurs in wild lateral ravines, and wherever there are houses there are walnut, pear, apple and apricot trees, with smooth green sward below, and the walnut branches often meet over the road.

“The houses are mostly large, often whitewashed, always brown-roofed, and much like Swiss châlets, but without the long slopes of verdure which make Switzerland so fair. Instead of verdure there is the wildest rock and mountain scenery, a congeries of rock-walls, precipices, and pinnacles, and the semblance of minarets and fortresses, flaming red, or burnt sienna, or yellow ochre, intermingled with bold fronts of crimson and pale blue rock. ...

“Far up picturesque ravines oxen were ploughing the red friable soil on heights which looked inaccessible; there was the velvety greenness of winter wheat; scrub oak and barberry find root-hold in rocky rifts, and among crags high up among the glittering snows contorted junipers struggle for a precarious existence. ...”

Finally, after many more turns of the journey through freezing temperatures and breathtaking terrain, the chapter concluded with:

“The valley opened, there was a low grassy hill, beyond it, broad yellow sands on which the ‘stormy Euxine’ thundered in long creamy surges, and creeping up the sides

of a wooded headland, among luxuriant vegetation, the well-built, brightly-coloured, red-roofed houses of the eastern suburb of Trebizond, the ancient Trapezus.

“It was the journey’s end, yet such is the magic charm of Asia that I would willingly have turned back at that moment to the snowy plateaux of Armenia and the savage mountains of Kurdistan.”

Also included in the book was a translation of an Arabic prayer, which was given by Canon Tristram in a delightful paper on Mecca contributed to the *Sunday at Home* volume for 1883.

A selection says:

“O God, I extend my hands to Thee: great is my longing towards Thee. Accept Thou my supplication, remove my hindrances, pity my humiliation, and mercifully grant me Thy pardon. O God, I beg of Thee that faith which shall not fall away, and that certainty which shall not perish... O God, shade me with Thy shadow in that day when there is no shade but Thy shadow.”

Eric looked out the window of the train. It wasn’t as dangerous a journey as Isabella took, though if he were to write about the scenery and landscape at this time of day on a winter morning, there probably wouldn’t be much to say, compared to what she wrote about. But, he wasn’t complaining. He had a relaxing form of transportation, and it wasn’t below zero inside. His tea and food hadn’t frozen solid, and there were no icicles forming on his face. All was well.

The words to the cheery poem "A Merrie Christmas,"
by Frances Ridley Havergal came to mind:

*A Merrie Christmas to you!
For we serve the Lord with mirth.
And we carol forth glad tidings
Of our holy Saviour's birth.*

*So we keep the olden greeting,
With its meaning deep and true,
And wish a Merrie Christmas
And a Happy New Year to you.*

*Oh, yes! 'a Merrie Christmas,'
With blithest song and smile,
Bright with the thought of Him who dwelt
On earth a little while,*

*That we might dwell for ever
Where never falls a tear:
So 'a Merrie Christmas' to you,
And a Happy, Happy Year!"*

Eric smiled as he was pretty sure what Frances' "Merriest Christmas" was—1879.

In a book called "Excellent Woman" published many years ago, Rev. J.P. Hobson wrote:

"On Christmas-day, 1878, her last Christmas upon earth, she awoke in severe pain, and was ill for some days; but during the time she compiled a set of Christmas and New Year mottoes, which she called 'Christmas Sunshine' and 'Love and Light for the New Year'. She was ordered to rest and felt she needed it.

"One remark as to her unceasing work is very touching: 'I do hope the angels will have orders to let me alone a bit when I first get to heaven.' She was learning to use as her daily petition the prayer her mother taught her, 'O Lord, prepare me for all Thou art preparing for me;' and this He was doing. By weakness and sickness and by unwearied trust and unwearied labour was she being prepared for that better rest above."

Eric knew, however, that it wasn't just her "unwearied labour" that left her a legacy and made her the quality and productive person she was known to be. But it was a secret list discovered in her Bible after she had gone on to her Heavenly reward.

Because she was weak and often in such great pain, this perhaps is what helped to drive her to find a greater strength than those who feel capable in themselves possess.

She knew she had to depend on God and His Spirit for each and every day, and to ensure she did this adequately, Frances wrote a list or prayer program, of what to commit to the Lord in prayer each day—daily prayer topics for each morning, and topics for each evening, and special topics for each day of the week.

Eric hadn't remembered it for a long time, but now seemed a good time to. New Year commitments were coming soon. Perhaps her method to gaining a successful life, in the true sense, was worth thinking about doing in the year to come.

Frances had said:

"I have greatly enjoyed the regular praying of the Lord's Prayer, and take a petition each morning in the week. Intercession for others I generally make at evening. I take the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the same way and find this helpful."

She had daily prayer topics, written, such as:

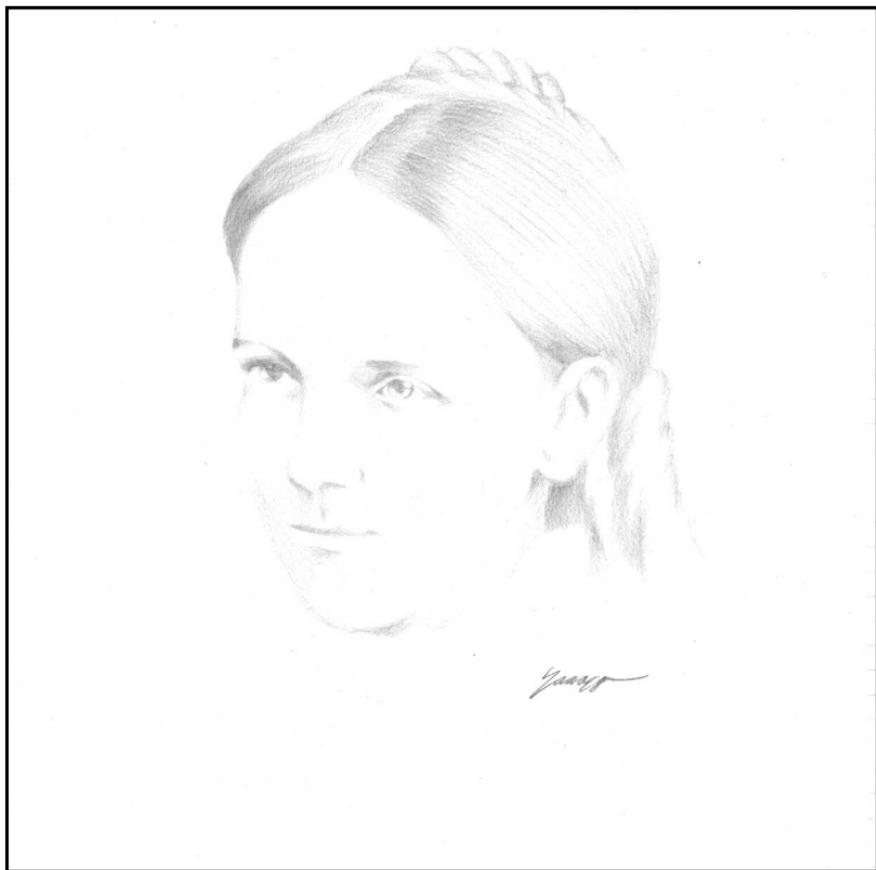
- Deliverance from wandering thoughts.
- Pure praise.
- That the life of Jesus may be manifest in me.
- That my unconscious influence may be all for Him.
- For spirit of prayer and shadowless communion.
- For much fruit to His praise. Soul-winning. Spirit of praise.
- Wisdom to be shown more of His will and commands.
- That the Word of Christ may dwell in me richly, open treasure of Thy Word to me, fill my seed-basket.

MORNING.

- **For the Holy Spirit.**
- **Perfect trust all day.**
- **Watchfulness.**
- **To be kept from sin.**
- **That I may please Him.**
- **Guidance, growth and grace.**
- **That I may do His will.**
- **That He may use my mind, lips, pen, *all*.**
- **Blessing and guidance in each engagement and interview of the day.**

EVENING.

- **For forgiveness and cleansing.**
- **Mistakes overruled.**
- **Blessing on all said, written and done.**
- **For conformity to His will and Christ's likeness.**
- **That His will may be done in me.**
- **For a holy night.**
- **Confession.**
- **For every one for whom I have been specially asked to pray.**



*Another year is dawning!
Dear Master, let it be
On earth, or else in heaven,
Another year for Thee!*

Portrait of Frances Ridley Havergal (By Nathan Lanagan)
Excerpt taken from "Kept for the Master's Use",
by Frances Ridley Havergal—1895

Each day of the week had one or two of the “fruits of the spirit” listed for prayer (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance); as well as who of her loved ones and acquaintances to pray for on that day.

Eric had learned much about this lady while doing a bit of research on a different subject. His sister Elizabeth had a good friend for a couple years. It was nice to see her opening up and getting close to someone. It was hard on the two of them when they could no longer live with their parents. They were both born very late in their parent’s life, so because of their elderly age, combined with some health challenges, now their parents needed full-time care.

The brother and sister now lived with their dad’s younger brother, Ned. He was always fond of his dear niece and nephew and would be the best caretaker he could be to them. Eric and Elizabeth’s parents had full confidence their children would do well with him. However, that wasn’t the only difficulty.

When Elizabeth’s good friend then passed away unexpectedly, it was a deeply saddening time for her. What could he do to help her? Eric took long walks and thought about it a lot.

Finally, he got an idea. He’d heard of a few interesting happenings occurring at the last moment in people’s life, or even when they passed away only briefly as well. There seemed to be growing evidence that rather than the close of life being a bad event in that person’s life, there was

something special and wonderful that happened; there were clues to show that there really was a glorious life beyond our Earthly existence—especially so for those who lived a life in loving friendship with Jesus.

So Eric set himself to work at compiling true accounts of this nature. He was sure this would cheer his sister. He kept a copy of this compilation, and brought it with him when he travelled. There was always someone who was grieving, it seemed, and reading parts of it with those interested helped to alleviate some of their inner pain. Eric pulled it out of his bag and found what he was looking for.

One particularly beautiful account was at the end of Frances Ridley Havergal's Earthly life, according to the eyewitnesses at her bedside. Rev. J.P. Hobson had learned all he could about her, collected all the evidence and anecdotes available, and wrote of her life, including this event.

"The last passage she looked at in her Bible was the Christian Progress chapter for May 28. She asked that it might be read to her, and dwelt on 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'"

"She suffered very severe pain; but though the outward man was perishing, the inward man was being renewed. ... At early dawn she made the remark, 'I am so happy. God's promises are so true. Not a fear.' At 8 A.M. it was thought she was departing. When the doctor told her she would soon be going home, she exclaimed. 'Beautiful! Too good to be true!... Oh! It is the Lord Jesus that is so dear to me, I can't tell how precious! How much He has been to me!'

“Afterwards she asked for ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!’”

“On Tuesday, June 3, she was evidently worse. Among the words she uttered were these: ‘I am lost in amazement! There hath not failed one word of all His promise!’ Mentioning the names of many dear ones, she said, ‘I want all to come to me in heaven; oh! don't, don't disappoint me; tell them, “Trust Jesus.”’

“Her sister thus describes the glorious sunset of her life on June 3, 1879, at the age of 42:

‘And now she looked up steadfastly as if she saw the Lord; and surely nothing less heavenly could have reflected such a glorious radiance upon her face. For ten minutes we watched that almost visible meeting with her King, and her countenance was so glad, as if she were already talking to Him.

‘Then she tried to sing, but after one sweet high note—“HE--,” her voice failed, and as her brother commended her soul into her Redeemer's hand, she passed away. Our precious sister was gone, satisfied, glorified, within the palace of her King.’

“And so she fell asleep, and her eyes saw the King in His beauty--that King of whom she sung so sweetly and wrote so loyally.”

Eric hoped his sister would have a good Christmas time, and he was hoping that somewhere along the way on his vacation he would happen upon the best gift to bring her when he returned. He closed the book and soon his eyes followed in like fashion.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Chuma and Susi, faithful former servants of Dr. David Livingstone, were tenderly looking over some papers and books. Dressed in next-to-nothing, with looks of sorrow on their faces, they were treasuring what would live on to tell the yet untold stories.

Eric broke out in a sweat, not only from the heat he suddenly found himself in, but as he looked down he saw he too was clad in much the same way as these natives. And not only that, but his skin was every bit as chocolate.

He reached to feel his hair and was once again taken by surprise. "I have wool for a head cap! Well, at least I feel safer and less noticed." A whiteman in these parts would have caused a bit of a ruffle.

Eric slipped behind a tree and continued to observed the two men who had worked with and helped Dr. David Livingstone through many trying times. Eric realised that not a soul in the United Kingdom—or elsewhere in the world, knew yet what those documents held. Later, these men would give them over to those who could read the English language and decipher the handwriting of this brave explorer and missionary.

The men then retreated into the hut for some time, making preparations for a long and difficult journey. While doing so, Eric-turned-African-tribesman silently crept over to where the papers and books were. A breeze opened a diary book and Eric read where his eyes fell on:

Dr. Livingstone wrote:

“Wherever the dense primeval forest has been cleared off by man, gigantic grasses usurp the clearances. None of the sylvan vegetation can stand the annual grass-burnings except a species of Bauhinia, and occasionally a large tree which sends out new wood below the burned places. The parrots build thereon, and the men make a stair up 150 feet by tying climbing plants (called Binayoba) around, at about four feet distance, as steps: near the confluence of the Luamo, men build huts on this same species of tree for safety.

“21st December, 1869.--The strong thick grass of the clearances dries down to the roots at the surface of the soil, and fire does it no harm. Though a few of the great old burly giants brave the fires, none of the climbers do: they disappear, but the plants themselves are brought out of the forests and ranged along the plantations like wire fences to keep wild beasts off; the poles of these vegetable wire hedges often take root, as also those in stages for maize.

“22nd, 23rd, and 24th December, 1869.--Mohamad presented a goat to be eaten on our Christmas. I got large copper bracelets made of my copper by Manyema smiths, for they are considered very valuable, and have driven iron bracelets quite out of fashion.

“25th December, 1869.--We start immediately after Christmas: I must try with all my might to finish my exploration before next Christmas.

“26th December, 1869.--I get fever severely, and was down all day, but we march, as I have always found that

moving is the best remedy for fever: I have, however, no medicine whatever. We passed over the neck of Mount Kinyima, north-west of Moenékuss, through very slippery forest, and encamped on the banks of the Lulwa Rivulet."

(From: *The Last Journals of David Livingstone, in Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death, Volume II [of 2]*)

Eric hears rustling and quickly retreats so as not to be seen, but it seems he has taken a leap back in time, yet further, to the new year following the Christmas he just read about. Eric finds he is in the presence of the famous Dr. Livingstone himself. The Doctor, though clearly weak in body is strong in determination. This is realised as he writes out his prayer for the New Year:

1st January, 1870.—“May the Almighty help me to finish the work in hand, and retire through the Basango before the year is out. Thanks for all last year's loving kindness.”

The good Doctor knew that prayer and paces go one with the other, and so the journey was continued.

Eric blended in with the team of travellers and lived the exciting, yet very trying, next several weeks along with them.

The diaries of this determined explorer who was equally as faithful to keep written records of his journeys and experiences, document some of the most notable parts of this trip.

1st January, 1870.— Our course was due north, with the Luassé flowing in a gently undulating green country on our right, and rounded mountains in Mbongo's country on our left.

2nd January, 1870.--Rested a day at Mbongo's, as the people were honest.

3rd January, 1870.--Reached a village at the edge of a great forest, where the people were excited and uproarious, but not ill-bred, they ran alongside the path with us shouting and making energetic remarks to each other about us.

A newly-married couple stood in a village where we stopped to inquire the way, with arms around each other very lovingly, and no one joked or poked fun at them. We marched five hours through forest and crossed three rivulets and much stagnant water which the sun by the few rays he darts in cannot evaporate.

4th January, 1870.-- The villagers we passed were civil, but like noisy children, all talked and gazed.

The women here plait the hair into the form of a basket behind; it is first rolled into a very long coil, then wound round something till it is about 8 or 10 inches long, projecting from the back of the head.

5th, 6th, and 7th January, 1870.--Wetings by rain and grass overhanging our paths, with bad water, brought on choleraic symptoms. On suspecting the water as the cause, I had all I used boiled, and this was effectual, but I was greatly reduced in flesh, and so were many of our party.

We proceeded nearly due north, through wilderness and many villages and running rills; the paths are often left to be choked up by the overbearing vegetation, and then the course of the rill is adopted as the only clear passage; ... even the hedges around villages sprout out and grow a living fence, and this is covered by a great mass of a species

of calabash with its broad leaves, so that nothing appears of the fence outside.

11th January, 1870.--The people are civil, but uproarious from the excitement of having never seen strangers before; all visitors from a distance came with their large wooden shields; many of the men are handsome and tall.

12th January, 1870.--Cross the Lolindé, 35 yards and knee deep, flowing to join Luamo far down: dark water.

13th January, 1870.--Through the hills Chimunémuné; we see many albinos and partial lepers and syphilis is prevalent. It is too trying to travel during the rains.

14th January, 1870.--The Muabé palm had taken possession of a broad valley, and the leaf-stalks, as thick as a strong man's arm and 20 feet long, had fallen off and blocked up all passage except by one path made and mixed up by the feet of buffaloes and elephants. In places like this the leg goes into elephants' holes up to the thigh and it is grievous; three hours of this slough tired the strongest: a brown stream ran through the centre, waist deep, and washed off a little of the adhesive mud.

Our path now lay through a river covered with tikatika, a living vegetable bridge made by a species of glossy leafed grass which felts itself into a mat capable of bearing a man's weight, but it bends in a foot or fifteen inches every step; a stick six feet long could not reach the bottom in certain holes we passed.

The lotus, or sacred lily, which grows in nearly all the shallow waters of this country, sometimes spreads its broad leaves over the bridge so as to lead careless observers to

think that it is the bridge builder, but the grass mentioned is the real agent. Here it is called Kintéfwétéfwé; on Victoria Nyanza Titatika.

15th January, 1870.--Choleraic purging again came on till all the water used was boiled, but I was laid up by sheer weakness near the hill Chanza.

20th and 21st January. 1870.--Weakness and illness goes on because we get wet so often; the whole party suffers, and they say that they will never come here again. The Manyango Rivulet has fine sweet water, but the whole country is smothered with luxuriant vegetation.

27th, 29th, and 30th January, 1870.--Rest from sickness in camp. The country is indescribable from rank jungle of grass, but the rounded hills are still pretty; an elephant alone can pass through it--these are his head-quarters. The stalks are from half an inch to an inch and a half in diameter, reeds clog the feet, and the leaves rub sorely on the face and eyes: the view is generally shut in by this megatherium grass, except when we come to a slope down to a valley or the bed of a rill.

We came to a village among fine gardens of maize, bananas, ground-nuts, and cassava, but the villagers said, "Go on to next village;" and this meant, "We don't want you here."

I was so weak I sat down in the next hamlet and asked for a hut to rest in. ...I had ere thus come to the conclusion that I ought not to risk myself further in the rains in my present weakness, for it may result in something worse.



David Livingstone 1813-1873

2nd February, 1870. ...We now climb over the bold hills Bininango, and turn south-west towards Katomba to take counsel: he knows more than anyone else about the country...

3rd February, 1870.--Caught in a drenching rain, which made me fain to sit, exhausted as I was, under an umbrella for an hour trying to keep the trunk dry. As I sat in the rain a little tree-frog, about half an inch long, leaped on to a grassy leaf, and began a tune as loud as that of many birds, and very sweet; it was surprising to hear so much music out of so small a musician. I drank some rain-water as I felt faint—in the paths it is now calf deep. I crossed a hundred yards of slush waist deep in mid channel, and full of holes made by elephants' feet, the path hedged in by reedy grass, often intertwined and very tripping. I stripped off my clothes on reaching my hut in a village, and a fire during night nearly dried them. At the same time I rubbed my legs with palm oil, and in the morning had a delicious breakfast of sour goat's milk and porridge.

5th February, 1870.--The drenching told on me sorely, and it was repeated after we had crossed the good-sized rivulets Mulunkula and many villages, and I lay on an enormous boulder under a Muabé palm, and slept during the worst of the pelting. I was seven days southing to Mamohela, Katomba's camp, and quite knocked up and exhausted. I went into winter quarters on 7th February, 1870.

7th February, 1870.--Rest, shelter, and boiling all the water I used, and above all the new species of potato called Nyumbo, much famed among the natives as restorative,

soon put me all to rights. Katomba supplied me liberally with nyumbo; and, but for a slightly medicinal taste, which is got rid of by boiling in two waters, this vegetable would be equal to English potatoes.”

Eric found himself then enjoying a meal of these African-type of boiled potatoes—some nyumbo—when he noticed something he hadn’t seen since the beginning of the New Year, when this trek with Dr. Livingstone began. As he lifted his hand to take the next bite, it became nearly the same colour as the nyumbo. His skin had returned to his usual light shade, his hair was once again what it used to be, and yes, his clothes were again that of an Irishman—though somewhat old-fashioned. He now sat in the home of an Irish family that lived on the coast of Queenstown. It was in the month of April, in the year 1857.

The stirring sounds coming from the nearby port seemed to beckon one and all to come and see what was going on. Eric rose, left the house along with the others and ran to the port. He saw that the dock was a cloud of handkerchiefs; while from windows, sheets, tablecloths, petticoats, anything that could be seen, went streaming on the wind.

The bark Louisa Kilham that had been in dry dock for some months was now seaworthy once again, and was setting sail. Eric wondered about the ship, and its captain and the story behind it all; why they had captured the affection of the townspeople? The heartfelt farewell showed there was a story to tell.

While in a bit of a daze he turned around to see none else than Captain B. S. Osbon making his way to board the ship.

As he walked along, Eric plucked up the boldness to walk along with him and have a word. Mr. Osbon smiled and welcomed his company.

In that brief walk, Mr. Osbon recounted to Eric the “Christmas Miracle”; for the fact that the ship and its crew made it to this Irish coast for Christmas was nothing short of Divine intervention. Mr. Osbon threw in a humorous account that had happened a few months later, on St. Patrick’s day, as well, that could help explain the enthusiasm on this day.

Eric kept up the pace and listened with interest as Captain B. S. Osbon retold the fascinating stories:

“On one trip, after discharging cargo we went to Newcastle, England, to load gas coal for New York, and the agent, anxious to secure a larger commission, against my protest loaded the vessel far too deep. We went “north about” — that is, up the North Sea, past the Orkney Islands — to shorten the passage, it being the latter part of November when we sailed.

“On entering the Atlantic Ocean we were met by a succession of fierce gales and it was impossible to work the ship to the westward. For days we battled with the storm. Finally the ship sprung a leak, our sails were blown away and we had a most terrible time.

“The water gained on us very fast, and the men’s hands were covered with running sores from their constant work at the pumps. It seemed impossible to save the ship.

“Finally the crew refused duty. It was just about noon and I was attempting to get our position from the sun as it appeared from time to time from beneath the flying clouds. The mate came over to where I was and said,

“‘Captain Osbon, the men are utterly discouraged and refuse to pump any longer.’”

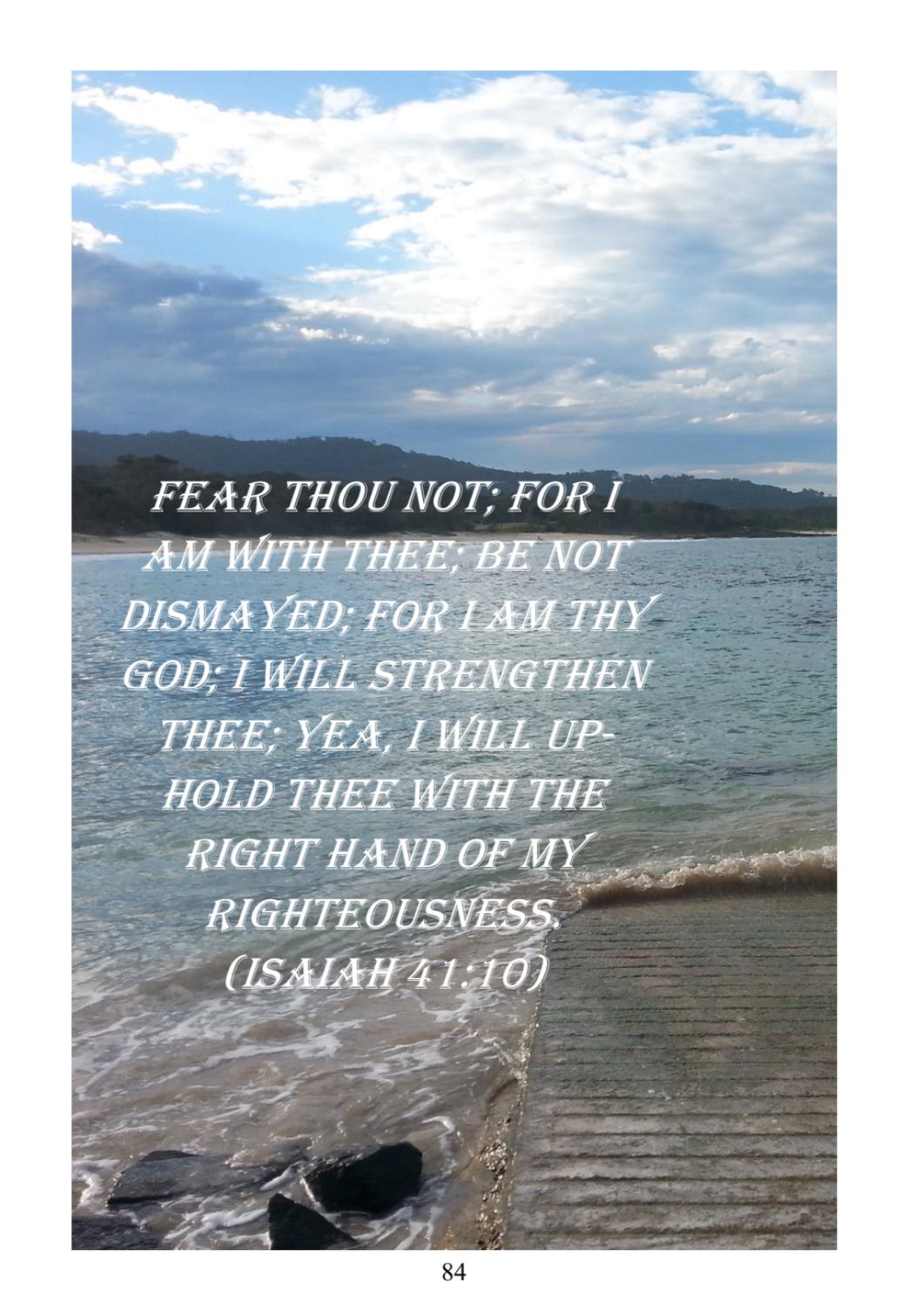
“I asked him to tell them to wait until I had worked up the ship's position. When that was done, I would ask them to come aft in a body. My intention was to plead with them once more to stick to the pumps. If they failed in this, our hope was gone, and I would request them to kneel in a last prayer.

“On sending for them, the crew came into the cabin, and I told them that where there was life there was hope, and begged them to go to the pumps again. They gave me a sorrowful but decided ‘No.’ Then I had an inspiration.

“‘Well, boys,’ I said, ‘let's ask God to help us.’ And taking up a Bible that always lay on the cabin table, I added, ‘I will open at random, and read the first verse that my eye falls upon.’

“Sailors in those days had great respect for the Bible. The men stood in perfect silence as I picked up the volume. I opened it entirely by chance, and my eye fell on the tenth verse of the forty-first chapter of Isaiah. I read aloud as follows:

“‘Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.’ (Isaiah 41:10)



*FEAR THOU NOT; FOR I
AM WITH THEE; BE NOT
DISMAYED; FOR I AM THY
GOD; I WILL STRENGTHEN
THEE; YEA, I WILL UP-
HOLD THEE WITH THE
RIGHT HAND OF MY
RIGHTEOUSNESS.
(ISAIAH 41:10)*

“I read no more, and stood and looked at the men for a moment, when one old sailor said, ‘Boys, let's go back to the pumps. That's a message from God to us, and He never lied. I believe he will fulfil this promise.’”

“They did go back and it was not many hours until the wind shifted and went down, the sea moderated, and on the 23d of December, 1856, we entered the harbour of Queenstown and came to anchor after having been buffeted about on the coast of Ireland for twenty-seven days, pumping the Western Ocean through the ship.

“I immediately employed a gang of 'longshoremen' to come off and man the pumps and sent my men to the forecandle, where they slept undisturbed until next morning.

“Then the underwriter's surveyors came aboard and the ship was ordered to the Royal Victoria Dockyard at Passage West, which lies about midway between Queenstown and Cork. There she received orders to discharge her cargo, go into dry dock and strip. The main and mizzenmasts were sprung and had to be taken out, and we remained at Passage West over four months.

“An amusing incident happened while our repairs were being completed. In the time that had passed between our arrival and St. Patrick's Day I had made many good friends and had received very handsome treatment.

“When the great day arrived, therefore, I was determined to show my respect for the country as well as my appreciation of the extraordinary hospitality, and I ordered made for me a gorgeous Irish flag, and at sunrise had the ship gaily dressed, while from the main royal masthead the banner and the harp of Erin tailed out on the breeze.

“The sight gave a vast joy to the townspeople, who arrived in delegations to congratulate me on my flag display and to contribute certain brands of the ‘old stuff’ — a barrel of which was guaranteed not to contain a single headache.

“But there is a fly in every ointment. Along about ten o'clock in the morning a twelve-oared cutter from the British guardship pulled alongside the dock, a middy with half a dozen blue-jackets landed, and to my surprise came aboard.

“There were about a dozen or more townspeople around me when the diminutive representative of the Queen approached me and in a funny, pompous voice asked, ‘Who is the master of this ship?’

“‘I am that person,’ I acknowledged, vastly impressed by his manner.

“‘To what am I indebted for this formal visit?’

Pointing to the green flag above us he said:

“‘You will haul that down instantly, sir, or I will order my men to do it for you!’

“‘I suppose I ought to have been very much frightened at this fierce command. Possibly I was. I know I was a good deal amused.

“‘Well, what's the matter with the flag?’ I asked. ‘Are you aware that this is an American ship and that you have no right on these decks without my permission? Take it easy, sonny, and tell me what's wrong with the flag.’

“‘Well,’ he snapped, ‘that flag has no crown over the harp, and my orders are to have it hauled down. Do you understand?’

“‘I think I gather the idea,’ I admitted. ‘I’ve heard better English than yours, but you mean well enough.’

“I now called one of my men and had the flag lowered. As it reached the deck I said to the midy, ‘There, little man, the flag’s down. Now run along and learn politeness.’

“As soon as he was gone I had a couple of my men make from yellow cloth two of the smallest crowns ever seen over a harp — the harp being fully three feet long, while the crowns were less than the same number of inches.

“These were sewed, one on each side of the offending flag, which, within an hour after it had been lowered, again went to the masthead amid the cheers of a throng of shore folk who had gathered to see what I was going to do, and who now crowded on board to join in a Patrick’s Pot of celebration.

“It was about one o’clock when a boat was reported coming up the river, heading for the docks. The news spread like wildfire, and the people came rushing from their dinners to see how the Yankee skipper was going to act. This time a young lieutenant headed the boat’s crew. As they reached the gangway, I leaned over the side, and was hailed.

“‘Good-day, sir, are you the master of the ship? If so, I would like a word with you.’ I replied in the affirmative and the officer tripped up the gangway. We exchanged cap courtesies, and he said,

“‘My commanding officer sent a message this morning to inform you that you cannot fly the Irish flag in port, and that it must be hauled down. I have no desire to do anything unpleasant, but I must obey orders.’

"But," I replied, 'the middy who came said that the objection was that no crown was over the harp, and this fault I have remedied.'

"The gentlemanly lieutenant gazed aloft and shifted his position, but he was not able to distinguish the emblem that was in dispute. Then he asked permission to call one of his men aboard, but the sailor's eyesight was no better. In fact no one could distinguish the little crowns at such an elevation.

"I now ordered one of my men to haul down the banner for a second time and spread it upon the deck — the great Irish harp with the funny little crown above.

"The lieutenant stared at it a minute; then he said:

"My dear fellow, that crown is all out of proportion to the harp. You could not distinguish it five feet away — much less at the masthead"

"But the crown is there," I insisted. 'Of course we have no naval book of instruction on how to build flags, and I may have made the crown on it a little out of proportion; but it's there, according to orders. Hoist the flag again, boys!'

"The poor lieutenant looked a bit puzzled, and after thinking a minute said, 'Good-day, Captain, I'll return to the ship and make my report.'

"I offered to share a Patrick's Pot with him, but he said he must hasten back, and left the vessel. As the crowd saw his boat leave our side they set up a wild cheering, and many Patrick Pots went around that afternoon, in sight of the old banner of Erin.

“A few days later an invitation came from the commanding officer of the guardship to dine with him on board the vessel. I went and met a jolly old captain, who greeted me most cordially, and introduced me to a choice lot of jovial fellows. We had a grand time, and I was asked to tell the story of the crownless and crowned flag, and I think everybody enjoyed the incident.”

(From: A sailor of fortune; personal memoirs of Captain B. S. Osbon, by Albert Bigelow Paine; published, 1906)

With stories now told and a ship to set sail, Captain B. S. Osbon bid Eric and everyone around a final farewell. Eric chuckled and wished Mr. Osbon Godspeed on whatever next adventure he was sure to encounter.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5

When Eric turned to make his way from the port of Queenstown back into town he realised that the enthusiastic cheering he now saw taking place was in an altogether different setting. Hats were waving and horses were riding down the road.

It seemed this enthusiastic crowd was saying farewell to a different brave explorer, from another time and place. The expedition was quite the opposite of those travelling by sea. Rather, the team leaving today would be exploring an area quite destitute of water.

Once the travelling team with horses and drays loaded with the basic supplies needed for such an arduous and challenging exploration were out of sight, Eric was able to communicate with someone around as to where he was and what was happening.

An elderly man walking with the aid of a cane, seeing Eric was not well-informed of all that had occurred that day, motioned for Eric to join him on a nearby bench.

“That was Edward Eyre, my son. He’s risking his life now, and those with him as well, for the betterment and advancement of our colonizing of Australia,” the man said in a solemn voice and moist eyes, followed by a pause.

After a moment Eric broke the silence,

“Can you tell me good Sir, what you have learned or heard today related to this team of brave explorers?”

The gentleman replied, "There was a stirring and sincere speech given by His Excellency the Governor, who ended with a solemn word. As closely as I can remember, he closed with saying,

"All here, and I believe the whole colony, give to Mr. Eyre their best wishes, but to good wishes right-minded men always add fervent prayers. There is an Almighty invisible Being in whose hands are all events--man may propose, but it is for God only to dispose--let us therefore implore his protection."

The gentleman also recalled some of the words of the Hon. Captain Sturt, who received a very handsome Union Jack cloth flag, neatly worked in silk by caring and skilled women, to be given to Mr. Eyre. Captain Sturt, while presenting it to Mr. Eyre, spoke nearly as follows:

"It cannot but be gratifying to me to be selected on such an occasion as this, to perform so prominent a part in a duty—the last a community can discharge towards one who, like you, is about to risk your life for its good. I am to deliver to you this flag, in the name of the ladies who made it, with their best wishes for your success, and their earnest prayers for your safety. ... Go forth, then, on your journey, with a full confidence in the goodness of Providence; and may Heaven direct your steps."

The gentlemen then added,

"Mr. Eyre, visibly and deeply affected, returned his warmest thanks, and expressed his sense of the kindness he had received on the present occasion. He hoped to be able to plant the flag he had just received in the centre of this

continent. If he failed, he should, he hoped, have the consciousness of having earnestly endeavoured to succeed. He expressed his trust that, through the blessing of God, he would be enabled to return to them with a favourable report of the country into which he was about to penetrate.

"Before the team's departure, Colonial Chaplain, the Rev. C. B. Howard, offered up an affecting and appropriate prayer. Then at twelve precisely, Mr. Eyre, accompanied by a very large concourse of gentlemen on horseback, left Government House, under the hearty parting cheers of the assembled party, as you may have witness some of today on this memorable day: 20th of June, 1840."

"Thank you, Sir, for your time and insight." Eric said, then took his leave and hoped to find a place to rest and grab a bite to eat.

One of the families in the colony welcomed him to stay for the afternoon in their small and humble home. The woman and her children served him a drink of water and a small bowl of stew, and showed him a bench in one room where he could lie down, should he need a rest.

Eric heartily thanked them, and offered, in return for their kindness, to assist in chopping some wood for their woodstove. Her husband had been gone for several days procuring needed items for his family as well as the colony. Any assistance Eric could lend would be greatly appreciated.

Once the offered task was completed, and enough firewood was stacked to last them for the next several days, Eric at last reclined and dozed for awhile. But though it seemed his body was at rest, something far more active was taking place.

Eric found himself briskly riding a fine steed through an arid and sandy terrain. Though inwardly he was still the same young man, outwardly and for the duration of this experience, it seemed he played the role of being Edward Eyre himself, on a long, wearisome and most trying expedition of many months.

It was a dream-trip of the actual historical journey, and it included Christmas day of 1840. In fact, the storyline of the dream covered ten long months. It was a most vivid experience not to be easily forgotten.

When Eric woke, he was still in the house of the hospitable family living in North Adelaide, South Australia. Seeing he was quite alone for the time being, Eric took a pen and notebook out of his bag and began writing down some of the most outstanding parts of his dream trip, within a dream. What he had encountered was strikingly identical to what Edward Eyre had also recorded in writing, of his long journey of discoveries.

If one reads these selected notes below, penned in Edward Eyre's book, they are allowed a small glimpse into what he experienced. The long title of his book being:

“Journals Of Expeditions Of Discovery Into Central Australia And Overland From Adelaide To King George's Sound In The Years 1840-1: Sent By The Colonists Of South Australia, With The Sanction And Support Of The Government: Including An Account Of The Manners And Customs Of The Aborigines And The State Of Their Relations With Europeans.”

“At first leaving Government House we had moved on at a gentle canter, but were scarcely outside the gates, before the cheering of the people, the waving of hats, and the rush of so many horses, produced an emulation in the noble steeds that almost took from us the control of their pace, as we dashed over the bridge and up the hill in North Adelaide--it was a heart-stirring and inspiring scene. Carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, our thoughts and feelings were wrought to the highest state of excitement.

“The time passed rapidly away, the first few miles were soon travelled over,--then came the halt,--the parting,--the last friendly cheer;--and we were alone in the wilderness. Our hearts were too full for conversation, and we wended on our way slowly and in silence to overtake the advance party.”

“The slopes of Flinders range are steep and precipitous to the westward, and composed principally of an argillaceous stone or grey quartz, very hard and ringing like metal when struck with a hammer. There was no vegetation upon these hills, excepting prickly grass, and many were coated over so completely with loose stones that from the steepness of the declivity it was unsafe, if not impossible to ascend them.”

“I made the overseer put new shoes on the horses I intended to take with me. The very stony character of the country we had been lately traversing and the singularly hard nature of the stone itself, had caused the shoes to wear out very rapidly, and there was hardly a horse in the teams

that did not now require new shoes; fortunately we had brought a very large supply with us, and my overseer was a skilful and expeditious farrier."

"At two miles from Mount Eyre we found a puddle of water in the midst of the plains, and halted at it for the night. Our horses had good grass, but would not touch the water, which was extremely thick and muddy. Upon trying it ourselves we found it was not usable, even after it had been strained twice through a handkerchief, whilst boiling only thickened it; it was a deep red colour, from the soil, and was certainly an extraordinary and unpalatable mixture."

"Moving on to the N. W. by N. we passed over heavy sandy ridges, with barren red plains between, and in one of the latter we found a puddle of rain water, this upon tasting. I found to be rather saline from the nature of the soil upon which it lay, the horses, however, drank it readily, and we put some in a small keg for ourselves."

"In traversing the country along the coast from Streaky Bay to the limits of our present exploration, within twelve miles of the head of the Great Bight, we have found the country of a very uniform description--low flat lands, or a succession of sandy ridges, densely covered with a brush of EUCALYPTUS DUMOSA, salt water tea-tree, and other shrubs--whilst here and there appear a few isolated patches of open grassy plains, scattered at intervals among the scrub. The surface rock is invariably an oolitic limestone,

mixed with an imperfect freestone, and in some places exhibits fossil banks, which bear evident marks of being of a very recent formation."

"The natives along this coast are not very numerous; those we have met with have been timid, but friendly, and in some instances have rendered us important assistance in guiding us through the brush, and shewing us where to dig for water--their language appears to be a good deal similar to that at King George's Sound. When questioned about the interior towards the north, they invariably assert that there is no fresh water inland; nor could we discover that they are acquainted with the existence of a large body of water of any kind in that direction."

"Christmas day came, and made a slight though temporary break in the daily monotony of our life. The kindness of our friends had supplied us with many luxuries; and we were enabled even in the wilds, to participate in the fare of the season: whilst the season itself, and the circumstances under which it was ushered in to us, called forth feelings and associations connected with other scenes and with friends, who were far away; awakening, for a time at least, a train of happier thoughts and kindlier feelings than we had for a long time experienced."

The geological character of the country was exactly similar to that we had been in so long, entirely of fossil formation, with a calcareous oolitic limestone forming the

upper crusts, and though this was occasionally concealed by sand on the surface, we always were stopped by it in digging; it was seemingly a very recent deposit, full of marine shells, in every stage of petrification.

In the evening several of the natives went down with the men to water the horses, and when there drank a quantity of water that was absolutely incredible, each man taking from three to four quarts, and this in addition to what they got at the camp during the earlier part of the day. Strange that a people who appear to do with so little water, when traversing the deserts, should use it in such excess when the opportunity of indulgence occurs to them, yet such have I frequently observed to be the case, and especially on those occasions where they have least food. It would seem that, accustomed generally to have the stomach distended after meals, they endeavour to produce this effect with water, when deprived of the opportunity of doing so with more solid substances. At night the natives all encamped with us in the plain.

“We were all now suffering greatly from the heat.

“Proceeding one mile towards the sea, we came to a projecting rock upon its shores; and as there was no hope of a better place being found, I tied up my horses near it; the rock was not large enough to protect them entirely from the sun, but by standing close under it, their heads and necks were tolerably shaded. For ourselves, a recess of the rock afforded a delightful retreat, whilst the immediate vicinity of

the sea enabled us every now and then to take a run, and plunge amidst its breakers, and again return to the shelter of the cavern.

“We then each had a little more tea, and afterwards attempted to dig for water among the sand-hills. The sand, however, was so loose, that it ran in faster than we could throw it out, and we were obliged to give up the attempt.”

“Following the general direction the native pathway had taken, we ascended the sand-drifts, and finding the recent tracks of natives, we followed them from one sand-hill to another, until we suddenly came upon four persons encamped by a hole dug for water in the sand. We had so completely taken them by surprise, that they were a good deal alarmed. Finding that we did not wish to injure them, they became friendly in their manner, and offered us some fruit, of which they had a few quarts on a piece of bark.

“This fruit grows upon a low brambly-looking bush, upon the sand-hills or in the flats, where the soil is of a saline nature. It is found also in the plains bordering upon the lower parts of the Murrumbidgee, but in much greater abundance along the whole line of coast to the westward.

“The berry is oblong, about the shape and size of an English sloe, is very pulpy and juicy, and has a small pyramidal stone in the centre, which is very hard and somewhat indented. When ripe it is a dark purple, a clear red, or a bright yellow, for there are varieties. The purple is the best flavoured, but all are somewhat saline in taste.

“To the natives these berries are an important article of food at this season of the year, and to obtain them and the fruit of the mesembryanthemum, they go to a great distance, and far away from water. In eating the berries, the natives make use of them whole, never taking the trouble to get rid of the stones, nor do they seem to experience any ill results from so doing.

“Having unsaddled the horses, we set to work to dig holes to water them; the sand, however, was very loose, and hindered us greatly. The natives, who were sitting at no great distance, observed the difficulty under which we were labouring, and one of them who appeared the most influential among them, said something to two of the others, upon which they got up and came towards us, making signs to us to get out of the hole, and let them in; having done so, one of them jumped in, and dug, in an incredibly short time, a deep narrow hole with his hands; then sitting so as to prevent the sand running in, he ladled out the water with a pint pot, emptying it into our bucket, which was held by the other native. As our horses drank a great deal, and the position of the man in the hole was a very cramped one, the two natives kept changing places with each other, until we had got all the water we required.

“In this instance we were indebted solely to the good nature and kindness of these children of the wilds for the means of watering our horses: unsolicited they had offered us their aid, without which we never could have accomplished our purpose. Having given the principal native a knife as a reward for the assistance afforded us, we offered the others a portion of our food, being the only way

in which we could shew our gratitude to them; they seemed pleased with this attention, and though they could not value the gift, they appeared to appreciate the motives which induced it.

“Having rested for a time, and enjoyed a little tea, we inquired of the natives for grass for our horses, as there was none to be seen anywhere. They told us that there was none at all where we were, but they would take us to some further along the coast, where we could also procure water, without difficulty, as the sand was firm and hard, and the water at no great depth.

“Guided by our new friends, we crossed the sand-hills to the beach, and following round the head of the Great Bight for five miles, we arrived at some more high drifts of white sand; turning in among these, they took us to a flat where some small holes were dug in the sand, which was hard and firm; none of them were two feet deep, and the water was excellent and abundant: the name of the place was Yeer-kumban-kauwe.

“Whilst I was employed in digging a large square hole, to enable us to dip the bucket when watering the horses, the native boy went, accompanied by one of the natives as a guide, to look for grass. Upon his return, he said he had been taken to a small plain about a mile away, behind the sand hills, where there was plenty of grass, though of a dry character; to this we sent the horses for the night. ...

“In the evening, we made many inquiries of the natives, as to the nature of the country inland, the existence of timber, rocks, water, etc. And though we were far from being able to understand all that they said, or to acquire

half the information that they wished to convey to us, we still comprehended them sufficiently to gather many useful and important particulars. In the interior, they assured us, most positively, there was no water, either fresh or salt, nor anything like a sea or lake of any description.

“After breakfast, in returning from the water, we had a feast upon some berries, growing on the briary bushes behind the sand-hills; they were similar to those the natives had offered to us, at the head of the Bight, on the 7th, were very abundant, and just becoming ripe.

“It was impossible for us to be insensible to the isolated and hazardous position we were in; but this very feeling only nerved and stimulated us the more in our exertions, to accomplish the duty we had engaged in; the result we humbly left to that Almighty Being who had guided and guarded us hitherto, amidst all our difficulties, and in all our wanderings, and who, whatever he might ordain, would undoubtedly order every thing for the best.

“The effect produced by refraction in these vast plains was singular and deceptive: more than once we turned considerably out of our way to examine some large timber, as we thought it to be, to the north of us, but which, upon our approach, proved to be low scrubby bushes. At another time we imagined we saw two natives in the distance, and went towards them as carefully and cautiously as we could; instead, however, of our having seen the heads of natives,

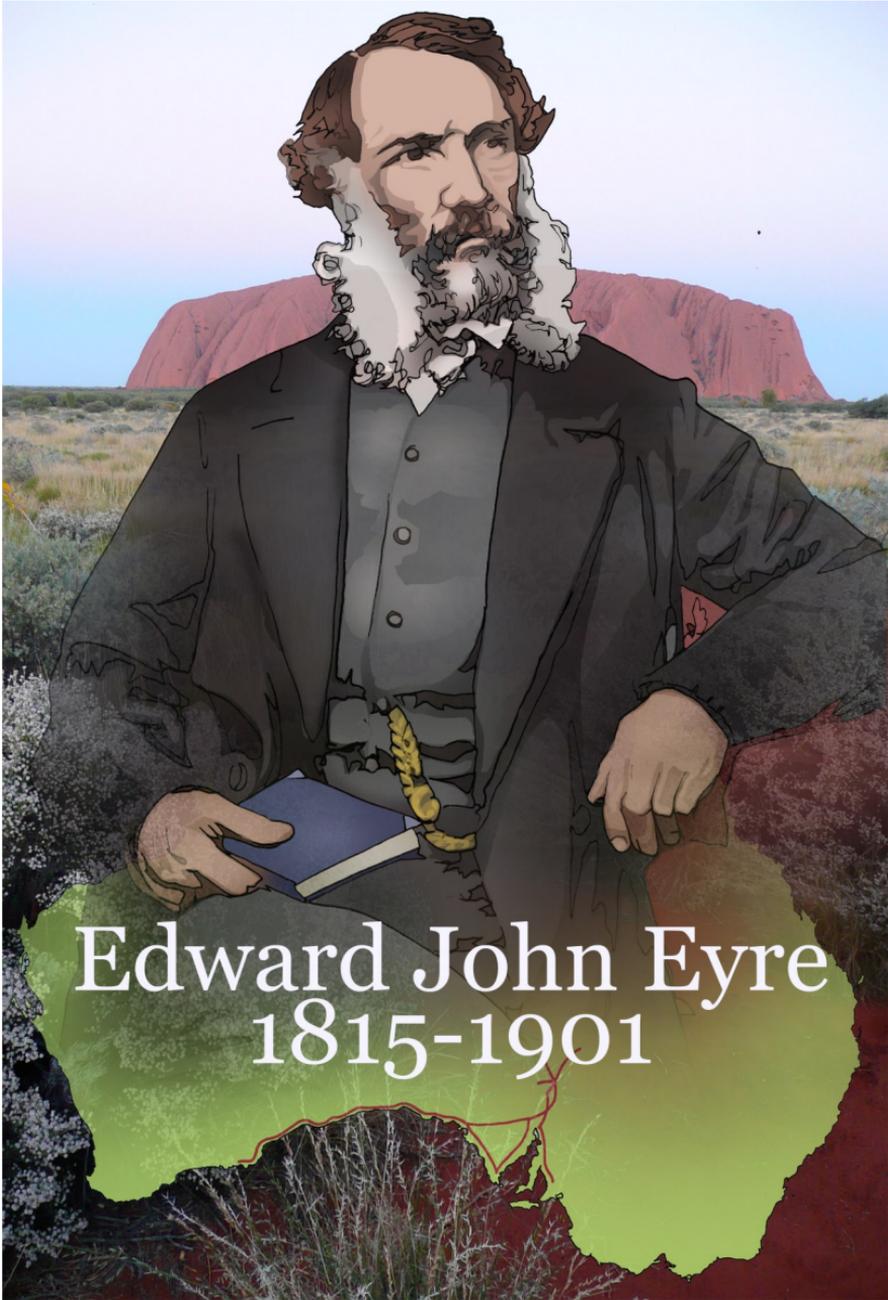
as we supposed, above the bushes, it turned out to be only crows. Yet the native boy, whose quickness and accuracy of vision had often before surprised me, was equally deceived with myself. ...

“Moving on early we passed through a similar country to that we had before traversed; but there was more of the tea-tree scrub, which made our travelling more difficult and fatiguing. This kind of scrub, which is different from any I had seen before, is a low bush running along the ground, with very thick and crooked roots and branches, and forming a close matted and harassing obstacle to the traveller. The sheep and horses got very tired, from having to lift their legs so high to clear it every step they took.

“The day was cloudy and gathering for rain, but none fell. After travelling twenty-five miles we halted for an hour or two to rest the sheep and horses, feeding was out of the question, for they were too much in want of water to attempt to eat the dry and withered grass around us.

“We now lay down to rest ourselves, and the boy soon fell asleep; I was however feverish and restless, and could not close my eyes. In an hour and a half I arose, got up the horses and saddled them, and then, awaking my companion, we again pushed on by moonlight.

“At ten miles we crossed a well beaten native pathway, plainly discernible even then, and this we followed down towards the cliffs, fully hoping it would lead to water.



Edward John Eyre
1815-1901

“Our hopes however had been excited but to render our disappointment the greater, for upon tracing it onwards we found it terminate abruptly at a large circular hole of limestone rock, which would retain a considerable quantity of water after rains, but was now without a single drop. ...

“I found myself actually dosing as I walked: mechanically my legs kept moving forwards, but my eyes were every now and then closed in forgetfulness of all around me, until I was suddenly thrown down by getting entangled amongst the scrub, or aroused by a severe blow across the face from the recoil of a bough after the passage of the boy's horse.

“The road now led us down a very rocky steep part of the cliffs, near the angle where they broke away from the beach, but upon reaching the bottom we lost it altogether on the sandy shore; following along by the water's edge, we felt cooled and refreshed by the sea air, and in one mile and a half from where we had descended the cliffs, we reached the white sand-drifts.

“Upon turning into these to search for water, we were fortunate enough to strike the very place where the natives had dug little wells; and thus on the fifth day of our sufferings, we were again blessed with abundance of water,-nor could I help considering it as a special instance of the goodness of Providence, that we had passed the sandy valley in the dark, and had thereby been deterred from descending to examine the sand-hills it contained; had we done so, the extra fatigue to our horses and the great length of time it would have taken up, would probably have

prevented the horses from ever reaching the water we were now at. It took us about two hours to water the animals, and get a little tea for ourselves.

“I called up the boy, and with his assistance dug two large holes about five feet deep, from which the horses could readily and without delay be watered upon their arrival. As we had only some shells left by the natives to work with, our wells progressed slowly, and we were occupied to a late hour. In the evening we watered the horses, and before laying down ourselves, drove them to the grass I had discovered. For the first time for many nights, I enjoyed a sound and refreshing sleep.

“The first streak of daylight found us on our way to meet the party, carrying with us three gallons of water upon one of the horses. ... I saw the party slowly filing along the cliffs above the valley, and leaving the boy to look about a little longer, I struck across to meet them. Both horses and people I found greatly fatigued, but upon the whole, they had got through the difficulty better than I had anticipated. ...

“At night, the whole party were, by God's blessing, once more together, and in safety, after having passed over one hundred and thirty-five miles of desert country, without a drop of water in its whole extent, and at a season of the year the most unfavourable for such an undertaking. ...

“The day following our arrival at the water was one of intense heat, and had we experienced such on our journey, neither men nor horses could ever have accomplished it; most grateful did we feel, therefore, to that merciful Being

who had shrouded us from a semi-tropical sun, at a time when our exposure to it would have ensured our destruction.

“During the night we travelled slowly over densely scrubby and sandy ridges, occasionally crossing large sheets of oolitic limestone, in which were deep holes that would most likely retain water after rains, but which were now quite dry. As the daylight dawned the dreadful nature of the scrub drove us to the sea beach; fortunately it was low water, and we obtained a firm hard sand to travel over, though occasionally obstructed by enormous masses of seaweed, thrown into heaps of very many feet in thickness and several hundreds of yards in length, looking exactly like hay cut and pressed ready for packing.”

“Whilst in camp, during the heat of the day, the native boys shewed me the way in which natives procure water for themselves, when wandering among the scrubs, and by means of which they are enabled to remain out almost any length of time, in a country quite destitute of surface water. I had often heard of the natives procuring water from the roots of trees, and had frequently seen indications of their having so obtained it, but I had never before seen the process actually gone through.

“Selecting a large healthy looking tree out of the gum-scrub, and growing in a hollow, or flat between two ridges, the native digs round at a few feet from the trunk, to find the lateral roots; to one unaccustomed to the work, it is a

difficult and laborious thing frequently to find these roots, but to the practised eye of the native, some slight inequality of the surface, or some other mark, points out to him their exact position at once, and he rarely digs in the wrong place.

“Upon breaking the end next to the tree, the root is lifted, and run out for twenty or thirty feet; the bark is then peeled off, and the root broken into pieces, six or eight inches long, and these again, if thick, are split into thinner pieces; they are then sucked, or shaken over a piece of bark, or stuck up together in the bark upon their ends, and water is slowly discharged from them; if shaken, it comes out like a shower of very fine rain.

“The roots vary in diameter from one inch to three; the best are those from one to two and a half inches, and of great length. The quantity of water contained in a good root, would probably fill two-thirds of a pint. I saw my own boys get one-third of a pint out in this way in about a quarter of an hour, and they were by no means adepts at the practice, having never been compelled to resort to it from necessity.”

“After calling up the party, I ascended the highest sand-hill near me, from which the prospect was cheerless and gloomy, and the point and sandy cones we imagined we had seen last night had vanished. Indeed, upon examining the chart, and considering that as yet we had advanced only one hundred and twenty-six miles from the last water, I felt convinced that we had still very far to go before we could expect to reach the sand-drifts.

“The supply of water we had brought for ourselves was nearly exhausted, and we could afford none for breakfast to-day; the night, however, had been cool, and we did not feel the want of it so much.”

“Our last drop of water was consumed this evening, and we then all lay down to rest, after turning the horses behind the first ridge of the coast, as we could find no grass; and neither the overseer nor I were able to watch them, being both too much worn out with the labours of the day, and our exertions, in searching for water.

“Getting up as soon as the day dawned, I found that some of the horses had crossed the sand ridge to the beach, and rambled some distance backwards. I found, too, that in the dark, we had missed a patch of tolerable grass among the scrub, not far from our camp. I regretted this the more, as during the night a very heavy dew had fallen, and the horses might perhaps have fed a little.

“Leaving the overseer to search for those that had strayed, I took a sponge, and went to try to collect some of the dew which was hanging in spangles upon the grass and shrubs; brushing these with the sponge, I squeezed it, when saturated, into a quart pot, which, in an hour's time, I filled with water.

“The native boys were occupied in the same way; and by using a handful of fine grass, instead of a sponge, they collected about a quart among them. Having taken the water to the camp, and made it into tea, we divided it amongst the party, and never was a meal more truly

relished, although we all ate the last morsel of bread we had with us, and none knew when we might again enjoy either a drink of water, or a mouthful of bread. We had now demonstrated the practicability of collecting water from the dew. I had often heard from the natives that they were in the habit of practising this plan, but had never before actually witnessed its adoption.

“It was, however, very cold work, and completely wet me through from head to foot, a greater quantity of water by far having been shaken over me, from the bushes, than I was able to collect with my sponge. The natives make use of a large oblong vessel of bark, which they hold under the branches, whilst they brush them with a little grass, as I did with the sponge; the water thus falls into the trough held for it, and which, in consequence of the surface being so much larger than the orifice of a quart pot, is proportionably sooner filled. After the sun once rises, the spangles fall from the boughs, and no more water can be collected; it is therefore necessary to be at work very early, if success is an object of importance. ...

“We had now travelled ten miles, and the sand-hills were about five miles further. The horses were, however, becoming exhausted, and the day was so hot that I was compelled to halt, and even now, in sight of our long-expected goal, I feared we might be too late to save them. Leaving the boys to attend to the animals, I took the overseer up one of the ridges to reconnoitre the country for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was no place near us where water might be procured by digging.

“After a careful examination a hollow was selected between the two front ridges of white sand, where the overseer thought it likely we might be successful. The boys were called up to assist in digging, and the work was anxiously commenced; our suspense increasing every moment as the well was deepened. At about five feet the sand was observed to be quite moist, and upon its being tasted was pronounced quite free from any saline qualities.

“This was joyous news, but too good to be implicitly believed, and though we all tasted it over and over again, we could scarcely believe that such really was the case. By sinking another foot the question was put beyond all doubt, and to our great relief fresh water was obtained at a depth of six feet from the surface, on the seventh day of our distress, and after we had travelled one hundred and sixty miles since we had left the last water.

“Words would be inadequate to express the joy and thankfulness of my little party at once more finding ourselves in safety, and with abundance of water near us. A few hours before hope itself seemed almost extinguished, and those only who have been subject to a similar extremity of distress can have any just idea of the relief we experienced. ...

“In this last extremity we had been relieved. That gracious God, without whose assistance all hope of safety had been in vain, had heard our earnest prayers for his aid, and I trust that in our deliverance we recognized and acknowledged with sincerity and thankfulness his guiding and protecting hand.

“It is in circumstances only such as we had lately been placed in that the utter hopelessness of all human efforts is truly felt, and it is when relieved from such a situation that the hand of a directing and beneficent Being appears most plainly discernible, fulfilling those gracious promises which he has made, to hear them that call upon him in the day of trouble.

“When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.’--Isa. xli. 17, 18.

“I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.’--Isa. xliii. 19.



***I will even make a way in the wilderness,
and rivers in the desert. --Isa. xliii. 19.***

“As soon as each had satisfied his thirst the pots were filled and boiled for tea, and some bread was baked, whilst the overseer and natives were still increasing the size of the well to enable us to water the horses.

“The single sheep gave us a great deal of trouble and kept us running about from one sand hill to another, until we were tired out, before we could capture it; at last we succeeded, and I tied him up for the night, resolved never to let him loose again.

“At night we all made up our supper with the bark of the young roots of the gum-scrub. It appears to be extensively used for food by the natives in this district, judging from the remnants left at their encamping places. The bark is peeled off the young roots of the eucalyptus dumosa, put into hot ashes until nearly crisp, and then the dust being shaken off, it is pounded between two stones and ready for use.

“Upon being chewed, a farinaceous powder is imbibed from between the fibres of the bark, by no means unpleasant in flavour, but rather sweet, and resembling the taste of malt; how far a person could live upon this diet alone, I have no means of judging, but it certainly appeases the appetite, and is, I should suppose, nutritious.

“From the overseer I learnt, that during the fifty miles he had retraced our route to obtain the provisions we had left, he had five times dug for water: four times he had found salt water, and once he had been stopped by rock.

“The last effort of this kind he had made not far from where we found water on the 30th of March, and I could not but be struck with the singular and providential circumstance of our first halting and attempting to dig for water on that day in all our distress, at the very first place, and at the only place, within the 160 miles we had traversed, where water could have been procured.”

Eric, still dreaming as if he was Edward Eyre, closed his eyes momentarily before opening them again to look out over the vast sandy and shrubby land ahead of them, then he thought in startled surprise:

“This must be another trick of the eye—desert terrain and strong refracted sunlight have a way of doing this.

Instead of regular sand and dirt he saw it was very white, quite snow-like in appearance. A cold wind blew and he wished for shelter.

Surprisingly, he found his eyes were not deceiving him at all. Indeed, freshly fallen snow was covering the ground, and as he looked around he soon spotted the perfect place for shelter: a small church or chapel.

“Where on Earth am I now?” he thought.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Eric, seeing that he was no longer in a vast Australian desert region, nor with the company he had just been with, made his way alone to the small church building. Quietly he entered, unnoticed, took off his hat and sat down at the back of the room.

Eric overheard a discussion between two men being carried on, which he hoped would give him a clue as to the time and place he had just been transported to. Though he couldn't make out all the words, he discovered they were trying to solve a challenge.

A roving band of actors was performing in towns throughout the Austrian Alps. Today, on December 23, they had just arrived there in Oberndorf—which is a village near Salzburg, in Austria. The actors planned to re-enact the story of Christ's birth as a special Christmas event at the Church. The play would, of course, need music. However, the organ at the small Church of St. Nicholas was out of order and in need of repair.

As Eric listened on, they seemed to say that there was a chance that a private home could be suitable for the performance. Yet, somehow it didn't seem like Christmas if the Christmas Eve service the following day would be without music.

The organist, Franz Xaver Gruber, agreed with Josef Mohr that music and songs of praise in honour of the birth of Jesus would cheer and stir the souls coming together. Not sure exactly what to do about it, the men parted to assist the band of actors in finding a place for their performance

that evening. They would likewise enjoy watching the play—a Christmas presentation of the events documented in the Bible, in the first chapters of books Matthew and Luke.

Eric hoped to find out just where the play was being held, as he walked around the village. He knew if he kept his ears and eyes open he'd notice where people were starting to go. And it worked; for by the evening, he along with many others sat, rather snugly I must say, watching a heart-inspiring and entertaining re-enactment of the First Christmas.

Seeing he was a stranger in town, without a place to rest for the night, a kind woman showed him to the home of Josef Mohr. He had a kind heart and would certainly help him.

As he showed up late that night at the home of Mr. Mohr, he was warmly welcomed in. Eric took a seat that was offered him by the hearth and a bit of warm broth they both enjoyed before retiring for the night. Eric was allowed to stay the night there on the sofa near the fire. He was glad for that and would keep it going well. It sure was a change in climate to suddenly go from the heat of a parched Australian desert to a cold, snowy Christmas in Austria.

After chatting briefly, Mr. Mohr excused himself. He had something on his mind and needed to prepare for the service tomorrow. As Mr. Mohr rested his head on his waiting pillow he remembered a Christmas poem he had written down. Maybe it was something that could be read and shared for the service on Christmas Eve. "Where did I put it?" he wondered, and decided to look for it in the morning.

Eric had just stocked up the fire and was about to lie down when his eyes happened on a piece of paper on the table nearby. The words on it began with:

Stille Nacht! Heil'ge Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hoch heilige Paar.
Holder Knab' im lockigen Haar,
|: Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh! :|

(Translation in English says:)

Silent night! holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
'Round yon virgin mother and Child!
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Eric was sure ready for just that—some good peaceful sleep. Since that carol is so well-known, he didn't really think anything of it. He didn't realise that it had yet to become one. It was, at that moment, still just a poem.

If he had know that the year was 1818, he would have known that the very next day “Silent Night” would be sung as a Christmas carol for the first time ever.

The next morning, Mr. Mohr greeted a well-rested Eric, and invited him for a simple breakfast. Eric returned the greeting with a cheery “Merry Christmas” and thanked him greatly for his kindness in taking him in.

“Well,” said Mr. Mohr, “I don’t want our village to be like the town of Bethlehem, without a spare place on Christmas for those who need a place to rest. I trust you were able to get sufficient rest?”

“Yes, I slept well, thank you,” Eric responded, “just as the words to that song that I found in the room, said: Sleep in Heavenly peace.”

“Song? Oh, that’s just a poem I wrote, and as a matter of fact I was wondering where I had put it. I was planning on using it for my evening’s Christmas Day service. But it has yet to become a song.”

“Really?” Eric asked, but then reminded himself that it just might be so, as he could have happily arrived just at the point in time when the now famous song, “Silent Night” was to be born and shared with the world.

Mr. Mohr who himself had gotten that very idea when he woke, that the poem could be put to music and played on guitar, soon excused himself saying he needed to go out for awhile. Eric was invited to the service in the evening, should he wish to come. And he certainly did want to come. He didn’t want to miss partaking of this memorable time in Christmas history.

Buzzed with this new idea, Mr. Mohr went to his friend a Franz Xaver Gruber, to see if he might be able to put a tune to this poem. There would only be a matter of hours in

which to complete this request, but it was worth a try. Mr. Mohr felt excited, like something special was to happen for this year's Christmas Eve service.

Mr. Gruber looked over the words and said he would give it a try. With that hopeful thought and a prayer together, the men parted and Mr. Gruber got to work at coming up with a suitable melody that would be well-fitting to both the words and the occasion. Before too long, the task was completed, to the joy of both Mr. Mohr and Mr. Gruber.

The church filled up that evening with those whose hearts wished to celebrate and commemorate the birth of the Saviour on Earth so many years before. Each one listened to all that Mr. Mohr had to say, and then enjoyed the special treat of being the first audience to hear this now most famous Christmas carol.

That night the congregation heard Mr. Gruber and Mr. Mohr sing their new composition to the accompaniment of Gruber's guitar. Everyone cheered and truly felt the joy of Christmas in their hearts. They all left with smiles and thanksgiving on their lips.

Eric smiled too as he walked outside looking at the gently falling snow and the quiet town that lay still and serene. He recalled what he remembered hearing about how this song made its way around the world:

Weeks later, well-known organ builder Karl Mauracher arrived in Oberndorf to fix the organ in St. Nicholas church. When Mr. Mauracher finished, he stepped back to let Mr. Gruber test the instrument. When Mr. Gruber sat down, his fingers began playing the simple melody he had written for

Mr. Mohr's Christmas poem. Deeply impressed, Mr. Mauracher took copies of the music and words of "Silent Night" back to his own Alpine village, Kapfing. There, two well-known families of singers — the Rainers and the Strassers — heard it. Captivated by "Silent Night," both groups put the new song into their Christmas season repertoire.

The Strasser sisters spread the carol across northern Europe. In 1834, they performed "Silent Night" for King Frederick William IV of Prussia, and he then ordered his cathedral choir to sing it every Christmas Eve.

Twenty years after "Silent Night" was written, the Rainers brought the song to the United States, singing it (in German) at the Alexander Hamilton Monument located outside New York City's Trinity Church.

In 1863, nearly fifty years after being first sung in German, "Silent Night" was translated into English (by either Jane Campbell or John Young). Eight years later, that English version made its way into print in Charles Hutchins' Sunday School Hymnal. Today the words of "Silent Night" are sung in more than 300 different languages around the world.

(From: <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/silent.htm>)

Eric feeling the joy of Christmas lifting his spirit, he hardly felt the cold, however he did wonder momentarily where he was to go next, seeing as it was night time. Scarcely did he share his smile and a "Merry Christmas" to the next person he encountered when he noticed a movement in the town. It seemed several people were making their way in a single direction.

“Are you coming, too?” asked the one he just greeted. But seeing the look of question on Eric’s face, they expounded,

“Tonight is the premiere of Handel’s Messiah—at least its first playing here in Boston. What a grand way to celebrate Christmas!”

Eric would love to go, but without a ticket what was he to do? Still, moved by the energy of the occasion and the people purposefully making their way, he too neared the building. Seeing the look of longing on his face, a gentleman approached him, though he did seem to be rather hastily on his way elsewhere.

“Merry Christmas, young man, this is for you. I am unexpectedly constrained to be elsewhere, regretfully, and thus and I cannot attend. But if it in turn gives you a memorable evening, I am glad that my loss can be your gain. Please, take this and enjoy yourself,” a distinguished gentleman said as he handed Eric a ticket.

Eric could hardly believe it, and tried to catch his breath for a moment before hasting out a, “Thank you very much! And a Merry Christmas to you, too!”

The gentleman was quickly taking his leave, tipped his hat and was off.

Eric felt he’d held such a glorious gift, and in wonder promptly made his way to settle in and imbibe the music, the words, and the very atmosphere. The experience of musically giving honour and praise to God truly uplifted the heart.

Each one, no doubt, would leave the place bettered after the nearly medicinal benefits of such glorious expressions of music—music in its highest form, music that was done to the sole purpose of uplifting the soul by its extolling the Maker of all.

There were a few moments left before the hush would fall and the orchestra would begin. Eric turned to a lady and her brother, who were discussing the facts they'd heard about what had inspired Handel to compose this "Messiah" and name it so. They included him in the conversation.

"Our dad said he read an article written about it—he would have been here tonight, but something urgent came up that bid him hurriedly leave. Such is the life of a good doctor. I suspect that a child is being born tonight, as we sit here and celebrate the birth of the One whose coming to Earth has changed history."

"How curious, or rather how coincidental," Eric commented, "for the very reason I sit here tonight is the fact that a man, perhaps even the father you are speaking of, handed me a ticket to attend this performance in his place." They all shook hands and introduced themselves to each other.

"Please to meet you," the brother James said, while the sister, Annette, was prompted on to tell what she knew about the oratorio about to be played.

"What our dad learned of the story behind the making of Handel's 'Messiah' and the increasing popularity of this oratorio, was, in short:

“In 1741 Charles Jennens made a collection of scripture passages from the Old and New Testaments which referred to the prophecies and birth of Christ, His death and resurrection, and the redemption and response of the believer. This he sent to George Fredric Handel.

“Also that year William Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, invited Handel to Dublin to participate in a season of oratorio concerts to benefit local charities. Handel accepted the invitation and began composing. He wrote Messiah in just 24 days—between August 22nd and September 14th.”

Eric asked, “So it’s been played a number of times before today’s performance here?”

James answered, “Yes, actually portions of this oratorio were performed at Boston’s Faneuil Hall in honour of King George III, in 1773. And three years ago, on Christmas Day, parts of this oratorio were played here in Boston also, as the first concert of the ‘Handel and Haydn Society’.

“That performance also featured Part 1 of Haydn’s oratorio ‘The Creation’. There were about 1,000 people in the audience, and 113 performers, 100 singers, and 12 instruments and an organist. From what I heard from people around town, it was simply stunning.

“One of the performers was quoted as saying, ‘Such was the excitement of the hearers and the enthusiasm of the performers that there is nothing to compare with it at the present day.’ So now, with the full oratorio of ‘The Messiah’ being performed here for the first time, we are eager to partake of it.”



Georg Friedrich Händel (George Frederick Handel)

—Portrait by Nathan Lanagan—

Handel's Birthplace

(From: Child's Own
Book of Great
Musicians: Handel,
by Thomas Tapper—
1916)



Annette added in, “However, we of course are not the first to witness the performance in its entirety. It was performed in Dublin in 1742, then in London in 1743 and 1745. Five years later, in 1750, there was a performance in England to benefit the Foundling Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children.”

Eric chimed in, “Oh, was that the place that was founded by Captain Thomas Coram?”

“Yes,” James answered, “He actually sailed here to America when he was nearly a teenager and grew to established a shipyard in Massachusetts. And something interesting too, he married a lady who was from Boston. Then when he was 52 he returned to England.

“For the nearly 20 years he had left in life he devoted it to what he saw as the biggest need—the care and training of parentless and uncared for, unhoused and uneducated children.

“The task was far too large for him as an individual to manage, so he worked for those many years to obtain a Royal Charter from the king to establish the first ‘Foundling Hospital’. At last it was granted in 1739, and preparation of the accommodation could begin.”

Annette spoke up with, “And every year, for the remainder of Handel’s life, from 1750-1759, Handel conducted the oratorio ‘The Messiah’ to give support to the needy children cared for at that place. He must have a heart for children along with Mr. Coram.”

James continued,

“It’s interesting to note that the very year Mr. Corum’s Foundling Hospital received its first infants for care, Handel composed the oratorio ‘The Messiah’; these two notable events occurring but a few months apart of each other— March and September of 1741.

“Mr. Corum was in his 70’s by that time, using every bit of his last years for the betterment of the poor and parentless children. It was the year before Mr. Corum passed away that Handel began what was to be the annual event of the performance of his *Messiah*, in support of the mission Mr. Corum started.

“He also composed and performed what is known as the ‘Foundling Hospital Anthem’. This was performed for the benefit of the hospital the year before, on May 27, 1749. That first charitable musical effort by Handel for the children Mr. Corum was helping, was a great success.”

Annette piped in with a chuckle, “So much so, that women attending were instructed to not wear hooped skirts so as to make room for the large number of people they anticipated would be participating—and indeed did attend.”

James added, “Handel became a ‘Governor of the Hospital’, donated an organ to the chapel, and conducted a yearly performance of ‘The Messiah’ as his mission efforts to better the lives of the children in need of care. Tickets were sold out in that first performance of ‘The Messiah’ for the Foundling Hospital, that another concert of it was arranged two weeks later, for those who had wanted to attend!”

“So he continued on with this his musical charity commitment for the last 10 years of his life, until 1759? I never knew that,” Eric expressed.

And now came the hush before the performance. Scarcely a lip moved, and the opening strains began to captivate the attention of each one there. Each note, each word of the Christ-glorifying oratorio surrounded and uplifted the audience. It was a wonderful way to express the true meaning of Christmas—and Easter as well, as Handel enjoyed or rather preferred performing it to commemorate Christ’s Resurrection.

Eric was enjoying every moment of the performance of Handel’s *Messiah* Oratorio in Boston. Then as he felt lifted in spirit as the “Hallelujah Chorus” was being played, he felt suddenly taken to another place and another time—yet still was he hearing the same Oratorio performed.

It took him only a short while to determine where he was. After hearing from James and Annette some of the other times *The Messiah* was performed, he guessed he was at the very first performance, in Dublin.

“Wow,” Eric thought. “This is really amazing! I get to hear the first time it is being played. This must be April 13th, 1742, during the time of lent, before Easter. Eric counted about 50 players and singers presenting *The Messiah* to the awestruck crowd.

He looked around and with an amused smile noticed no wire hoops were being worn in women’s skirts, just long skirts and dresses that hung down.

“I guess they made that same announcement here for this performance, so as many as possible would get to attend.”

Eric thought how wonderful it is that something now so famous, never started out with self-glorifying or monetary motives. It had rather been created as a way to tell others the Good News of the Saviour, and was also done for the betterment of the under-privileged. Thus it was a work of true beauty and genuine success.

Handel's Messiah

--George Frederic Handel (1695-1759)

Part I

(1) Overture

(2) Comfort Ye

Isaiah 40:1-3--Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. . . . The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

(3) Every Valley

Isaiah 40:4--Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.

(4) And the Glory of the Lord

Isaiah 40:5--And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.



(5) Thus saith the Lord

Haggai 2:6,7--Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet once, a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come

Malachi 3:1--The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.

(6) But who may abide the Day of His Coming?

Malachi 3:2--But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire.

(7) And He shall Purify

Malachi 3:3--And He shall purify the sons of Levi. . . that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

(8) Behold A Virgin Shall Conceive

Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23)--Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name EMMANUEL, God with us.

(9) O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion

Isaiah 40:9--O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, and be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isaiah 60:1--Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.



(10) For behold, darkness shall cover the earth

Isaiah 60:2,3--For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

(11) The people that walked in darkness

Isaiah 9:2 (Matthew 3:16)--The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

(12) For unto Us a Child is born

Isaiah 9:6--For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

(13) Pastoral Symphony

(14) There were shepherds abiding in the field

Luke 2:8--There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Luke 2:9--And lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

(15) And the Angel said unto them

Luke 2:10,11--And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.



(16) And suddenly there was with the Angel

Luke 2:13--And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

(17) Glory to God

Luke 2:14--Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

(18) Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion

Zechariah 9:9,10 (Matthew 21:5)--Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is the righteous Savior. . . And he shall speak peace unto the heathen.

(19) Then shall the eyes of the blind

Isaiah 35:5,6--Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

(20) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd

Isaiah 40:11--He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; and he shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Matthew 11:28, 29 28--Come unto [Him], all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and [He shall] give you rest. 29. Take [his] yoke upon you, and learn of [Him]; for [he is] meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

(21) His yoke is easy

Matthew 11:30--[His] yoke is easy, and [his] burden is light.



Part II

(22) Behold the lamb of God

John 1:29--Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.

(23) He was despised

Isaiah 53:3--He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . Isaiah 50:6--[He]gave [His] back to the smiters, and [His] cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: [He] hid not [His] face from shame and spitting.

(24) Surely He hath borne our griefs

Isaiah 53:4,5--Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . 5. . . He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him,

(25) And with His stripes we are healed

Isaiah 53:5b--and with His stripes we are healed

(26) All we like sheep have gone astray

Isaiah 53:6--All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

(27) All they that see him laugh him to scorn

Psalm 22:7--All they that see [him]laugh [him] to scorn: they shoot out their lips, they shake their heads, saying:

(28) He trusted in God

Psalm 22:8 (Matthew 27:43)--He trusted [in God] that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, if he delight in him.



(29) Thy rebuke hath broken His heart

Psalm 69:20--[Thy] rebuke hath broken [his] heart; [He is] full of heaviness. [He] looked for some to have pity [on Him], but there was none; neither found [He] any to comfort [Him].

(30) Behold, and see if there be any sorrow

Lamentations 1:12--Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto [his] sorrow. . .

(31) He was cut off out of the land of the living

Isaiah 53:8b--he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of [Thy] people was He stricken.

(32) But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell

Psalm 16:10 (Acts 2:27)--[But] thou [didst] not leave [his] soul in hell; neither [didst] thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

(33) Lift up your heads, O ye gates

Psalm 24:7-10--Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 9. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

(34) Unto which of the angels said He at any time

Hebrews 1:5 (Psalm 2:7)--For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

(35) Let all the angels of God worship Him

Hebrews 1:6b--"Let all the angels of God worship Him."



(36) Thou art gone up on high

Psalm 68:18 (Ephesians 4:8)--Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

(37) The Lord gave the word

Psalm 68:11--The Lord gave the word: great was the company of [the preachers].

(38) How beautiful are the feet

Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7)--How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

(39) Their sound is gone out

Romans 10:18 (Psalm 19:4)--their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world.

(40) Why do the nations so furiously rage together?

Psalm 2:1,2 (Acts 4:25-26)--Why do the heathen rage, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed,

(41) Let us break their bonds asunder

Psalm 2:3--Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us.

(42) He that dwelleth in heaven

Psalm 2:4--He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision.

(43) Thou shalt break them

Psalm 2:9--Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.



(44) Hallelujah

Revelation 19:6--Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Revelation 11:15 15. . . the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 19:16 16. . . KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS.

Part III

(45) I know that my redeemer liveth

Job 19:25, 26--I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand on the latter day upon the earth: And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

1Corinthians 15:20--[For] now is Christ risen from the dead. . . the firstfruits of them that [sleep].

(46) Since by man came death

1Corinthians 15:21,22--Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

(47) Behold I tell you a mystery

1Corinthians 15:51,52--Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep; but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;

(48) The trumpet shall sound

1Corinthians 15:52b-53--The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, -and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.



(49) Then shall be brought to pass

1Corinthians 15:54b (Isaiah 25:8)--Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

(50) O death where is thy sting?

1Corinthians 15:55-56 (Hosea 13:14)--O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

(51) But thanks be to God

1 Corinthians 15:57 57. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(52) If God be for us

Romans 8:31, 33, 34--If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us.

(53) Worthy is the Lamb

Revelation 5:12, 13--Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. . . . Blessing, and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen.

(End of lyrics for “The Messiah”)

When at last the performance of *The Messiah* came to a close, and the prolonged applauding had faded, Eric talked with the young man sitting on his left, who clarified to Eric that this premiere of *The Messiah* in Dublin was to benefit not just one, but rather three charities: For the Support of Mercer’s Hospital in Stephens’s Street, the Charitable Infirmary on the Inns Quay, and for Relief of the Prisoners in several Gaols (jails).

Though Eric would have lingered, somehow when the word “prisoners” was spoken, it caused Eric to awake once again on the train to Dublin; as coincidentally one of the passengers had voiced the very same word when talking about the train stop they are now arriving at—Portlaoise.

Once awake, Eric began to casually overhear the conversation and facts being voiced to a few tourists by a well-informed Irishman.

“Of course the first place of note that comes to mind as we stop here at Portlaoise is that it is home to Portlaoise Prison where the majority of Irish Republican Prisoners are held. The Portlaoise train station was opened on June 6th, 1847. It sits above the actual town of Portlaoise, which was named Maryborough until 1929, after the foundation of the Irish Free State. It’s a major commercial town that has many arts and music festivals. It is twinned with Coulounieix-Chamiers in the Dordogne department of France. Since 2008, Portlaoise has been the Irish base of Self Help Africa, which is engaged in implementing long term rural development in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was established during the Ethiopian famine of 1984, and is the chosen charity of The Irish Farmers Association.”

Eric wasn't listening attentively to all that was being said to the tourists, as his thoughts were on those enclosed in walls and behind bars who could not enjoy freedom this Christmas.

He chided himself, *"To think that only earlier this morning I was complaining about the weather! Imagine what it must be like not to have any choice in where you go or what you do, or wear. Thank God for my freedom."*

Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! Seemed to echo in Eric's mind to the beat of the train's chug. This rather lulled him back into a dreamlike state. He was taken back in time to another place where he was to get a glimpse into the lives of a couple of individuals who, though they seem to be deprived of freedom, still, indefatigably, shone the light of their life the best they could, and brightened the hearts of the so called "free."



Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Eric felt a little out of place, though he really had no reason to. Just because his skin and hair colour were different somewhat—or a lot—from those in the small living quarters, didn't mean he was unwelcome or all that different. What goes on in the heart is really what matters, and if there was an X-ray machine that could tell “the intents of the heart” it would have shown that he was in a room full of same-hearted folks, people who were of the Christian faith.

The tired, weathered, but warm-hearted coloured folks were meeting in a small room for an evening celebration of the Birth of Christ. And this Christmas, Jupiter Hammon had something special to share. He had felt the call in his heart to write of his faith in a poetic way; a poem that he was hoping would touch the lives of many. He saw that it wasn't just the “blacks” that were suffering or that weren't “free”, everyone needed freedom from their past, from the weight of their sins, and from their ungodly ways and vices and bad thoughts; the freedom that the forgiveness of Christ gives to those who humbly ask and thus receive.

Wouldn't it be the best gift if all in the country, and all around the world, would receive the gift of freedom of heart, mind and spirit? And it was with joy that Jupiter could announce that a poem he penned was being published this Christmas—the Christmas of 1761! He hoped with all his heart that it would be a salve to soothe many aching hearts and encumbered lives.

The ones there that evening were some of the first to hear him read what is now a historical and memorable piece of work—the first known poetry published by an African American slave.

Most of those listening to him read hadn't been allowed to receive much education, and some couldn't read or write either, but the words of this poem would be written on their hearts forever, if they choose to embrace the golden words of this, what Jupiter called, "An Evening Thought".

Eric quietly sat on the floor in the corner of the room. It was clear that no one could see him or sense his presence, and it was a good thing too, as freedom to associate as a friend with various nationalities and classes of people wasn't what it should have been back then.

He was glad to know that things would change in the future, somewhat. But the only true change that would bring joyful unity and brotherhood between all people types was if the poem that was about to be read was publicized far and wide, and if the thoughts expressed therein were embraced by hearts worldwide. Without the true unity that the message contained in it would bring, there would be little hope of "Peace on Earth, good will to men."

An Evening Thought:
Salvation by Christ, with Penetential Cries

By Jupiter Hammon

Salvation comes by Jesus Christ alone,
The only Son of God;
Redemption now to every one,
That love his holy Word.
Dear Jesus we would fly to Thee,
And leave off every Sin,
Thy Tender Mercy well agree;
Salvation from our King.
Salvation comes now from the Lord,
Our victorious King;
His holy Name be well adored,
Salvation surely bring.
Dear Jesus give Thy Spirit now,
Thy Grace to every Nation,
That han't the Lord to whom we bow,
The Author of Salvation.
Dear Jesus unto Thee we cry,
Give us the Preparation;
Turn not away thy tender Eye;
We seek thy true Salvation.

Salvation comes from God we know,
The true and only One;
It's well agreed and certain true,
He gave his only Son.
Lord hear our penitential Cry:
Salvation from above;
It is the Lord that doth supply,
With his Redeeming Love.
Dear Jesus by thy precious Blood,
The World Redemption have:
Salvation now comes from the Lord,
He being thy captive slave.
Dear Jesus let the Nations cry,
And all the People say,
Salvation comes from Christ on high,
Haste on Tribunal Day.
We cry as Sinners to the Lord,
Salvation to obtain;
It is firmly fixt his holy Word,
Ye shall not cry in vain.
Dear Jesus unto Thee we cry,
And make our Lamentation:
O let our Prayers ascend on high;
We felt thy Salvation.
Lord turn our dark benighted Souls;
Give us a true Motion,
And let the Hearts of all the World,
Make Christ their Salvation.

Ten Thousand Angels cry to Thee,
Yea louder than the Ocean.
Thou art the Lord, we plainly see;
Thou art the true Salvation.
Now is the Day, excepted Time;
The Day of Salvation;
Increase your Faith, do no repine:
Awake ye every Nation.
Lord unto whom now shall we go,
Or seek a safe Abode;
Thou hast the Word Salvation too
The only Son of God.
Ho! every one that hunger hath,
Or pineth after me,
Salvation be thy leading Staff,
To set the Sinner free.
Dear Jesus unto Thee we fly;
Depart, depart from Sin,
Salvation doth at length supply,
The Glory of our King.
Come ye Blessed of the Lord,
Salvation greatly given;
O turn your Hearts, accept the Word,
Your Souls are fit for Heaven.
Dear Jesus we now turn to Thee,
Salvation to obtain;
Our Hearts and Souls do meet again,
To magnify thy Name.

Come holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
The Object of our Care;
Salvation doth increase our Love;
Our Hearts hath felt thy fear.
Now Glory be to God on High,
Salvation high and low;
And thus the Soul on Christ rely,
To Heaven surely go.
Come Blessed Jesus, Heavenly Dove,
Accept Repentance here;
Salvation give, with tender Love;
Let us with Angels share.

After listening, Eric remembered a verse in a heart-stirring Christmas carol that seemed to be right for the moment. It was originally a poem written by Placide Cappeau de Roquermaure, for Christmas in 1847. This man was a wine seller in France, who was asked by the parish priest to write a poem for Christmas. He did, and wrote the words of the beautiful hymn, "Oh, Holy Night."

The poem seemed to call for music, and thankfully Cappeau had a friend who had studied music in Paris and who was a brilliant composer. Cappeau approached his friend, Adolphe Charles Adam about it. Adolphe agreed and composed the music to accompany the new poem. Later on, this Christmas Carol was translated into English by John Sullivan Dwight, who also lived until the late 1800s.

So as Eric walked out of the room, knowing he was neither heard nor seen, he sang with might and gusto, the last verse of “Oh, Holy Night”:

*Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!*

A strange thing occurred however, as Eric walked out the door, singing the hymn originally composed in France. Rather than exiting a building, it appeared as if he was stepping into the door of another place—and time; and this time he was in France. He could tell by looking down and seeing what he was wearing all of a sudden, as well as the garb of the others in the room he was stepping into.

It was the year 1695 AD, and he seemed to be interrupting an intense discussion taking place at a Christmas dinner party. By the looks of it, those talking in hushed, emotion filled voices, didn’t want to be overheard.

One man said, “Even the King has been on her side and wouldn’t agree to her imprisonment. I’ve done all I could to come up with all the reasons I can muster to get him to agree with our plans. At last we have placed enough pressure on him, and have succeeded.”

Another man said, “The only problem is, she’s in hiding. But as soon as we find her...”

At that moment they hushed, turned to see who was entering, and put on immediate smiles as they saw a servant—Eric—entering the room with a tray filled with delicious food.

Eric kept a calm and uninterested look on his face, as if he had heard nothing; however his mind was racing with this clue. As he served this next course of the meal to these well-fed, conniving men, he was thinking, “Let’s see... I’m in France, and there is a woman they want to arrest and imprison that the King didn’t agree with... and by the way my trip has gone so far, I’m probably back in time. Last time it was the 1700s... Could this be the 1600s?”

After helping to serve the men, and pour their next glass of wine, Eric appeared to leave briskly, yet lingered just a moment at the door enough to hear the conversation continue.

“Cheers! Let’s toast! Madam Guyon will no longer be a nuisance in our land!” the men toasted.

“Madam Guyon?” Eric thought. I wish I knew where she was right now this Christmas. If I could find her and hide her even better, I would.

Eric knew this was her last Christmas as free woman for the next ten years, though she really wasn't all that free, as she had to be in hiding. It wasn't that she had committed a crime, but only as big a crime as so many have suffered for—for helping others to know the truth and love of Jesus.

Madam Guyon had been wealthy before, but had given it up to travel around as poor, to live as Jesus' disciples and to help whoever she could. She had spent much time in convents as well, and was always seeking a way to be yet closer to the One whom she loved intensely—Jesus Christ. It was this love for Jesus that had set her at odds with those who had a pretend or warped sense of Christianity. Many lies were told about her, but to the dismay of malicious folks, they could not trap her in their plans.

She carried on speaking to people and writing many beautiful things, all with the goal of helping hearts to open up to the greatest love they would ever feel and know—the unlimited, wonderful love of Jesus.

In a book of old poetry kept by his grandmother, Eric had read this poem by Madam Guyon:

I love, my God, but with no love of mine,

For I have none to give;

I love Thee, Lord, but all the love is Thine,

For by Thy life I live.

I am as nothing, and rejoice to be

Emptied and lost and swallowed up in Thee.

*Thou, Lord, alone art all Thy children need,
And there is none beside;
From Thee the streams of blessedness proceed;
In Thee the blest abide,
Fountain of life, and all-abounding grace,
Our source, our centre, and our dwelling place.*

Eric knew what she was doing this Christmas—and it was good she was, as time was ticking and only a couple days remained until her incarceration was followed by very difficult years. She was not strong in health and endured many painful and debilitating illnesses, but this didn't stop her pursuers—nor her love for God.

Eric could imagine her in a dimly-lit room, or perhaps a cellar or basement, resting, praying, writing, and getting up to do whatever work she could manage. He had an idea of this, and of the days she had yet remaining, as he had read about it in her autobiography; the long writing of her life that she, Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon, was forced to do.

“I took the resolution of continuing in Paris, of living there in some private place with my maids, who were trusty and sure, and to hide myself from the view of the world. I continued thus for five or six months. I passed the day alone in reading, in praying to God, and in working.

“But on December 27, 1695, I was arrested, though exceedingly indisposed at that time, and conducted to Vincennes.”

Eric knew this document detailing her life was no made up story. That was proved by the fact that after being compelled, while in prison, to write up everything about herself.

The first long document that was painstakingly written, was rejected. She was told to rewrite it all over again, only adding yet more details of her life, and not to leave out anything that came to her thoughts and mind and memory while doing so.

Her persecutors were trying to find her guilty of something, and she tried to list every fault or sin she could think of as well, but their requesting this of her allowed something interesting to be shown.

What came to her mind and her thoughts? She was frequently talking with the Lord, and this showed up in her manuscript. In between thoughts, and woven all throughout, is also included her dialogue with Jesus while taking her journey back down memory lane.

Those holding her in tough custody that demanded her life story be written and rewritten, had read the first manuscript and would have noticed if there were inconsistencies in the second. So what she wrote, a document that copies were made of and passed on, preserved and eventually printed and translated, Eric knew was a true account of her life.



Madam Guyon

1648-1717

As Eric walked down the hall he saw an empty room with some papers and a pen on a desk, as well as a bookshelf. It was a room for study. He slipped quietly in to see what he could find out, and to glance at the books read by folks at this time in history. There would be enough time before serving the next dainties, to do so.

To Eric's surprise, on the chair near the glowing coals in the fireplace was a book written by none else than J. M. B. De La Mothe Guyon. "What's this? They even keep a book written by her, and are out to stop her—because she wrote it, and because of other of her writings and words she said—yet the book itself they do not condemn. They can tell the words are true and right, but think that the author is to be punished for the audacity of writing it. They don't ban the book, just condemn the writer. Boy, are things mixed up around here!"

Eric read the title:

A SHORT METHOD OF PRAYER and SPIRITUAL TORRENTS.

Curious, and knowing that the men down the hall were much too inebriated to waddle down this way, he felt certain he could grab a few moments in this study without being told to keep working. He peeked through the book, reading random portions here and there, starting with the introduction:

Madam Guyon writes:

"I did not write this little work with the thought of its being given to the public. It was prepared for the help of a few Christians who were desirous of loving God with the whole heart. But so many have requested copies of it,

because of the benefit they have derived from its perusal, that I have been asked to publish it."

Continuing to flip through it, Eric's eyes fell on the text:

"How hungry these loving ones are after suffering! They think only of what can please their Beloved..."

"I guess that proved true in her life," Eric mused then flipped to get more of a taste of what she was writing about, and read:

"Oh, if all could learn this method, so easy that it is suited for all, for the most ignorant as for the most learned, how easily the whole Church would be reformed! You only need to love. St Augustine says, 'Love, and do as you please;' for when we love perfectly, we shall not desire to do anything that could be displeasing to our Beloved."

"If only!" Eric muttered, thinking of all the horrible things he's heard that go on in the world—and at the root of each thing was just that: a lack of love—for God and others.

Another selection he flipped to in the short time he had, stated:

"God has an attracting virtue, which draws the soul more strongly towards Himself; and in attracting it, He purifies it: as we see the sun attracting a dense vapour, and gradually, without any other effort on the part of the vapour than that of letting itself be drawn, the sun, by bringing it near to himself, refines and purifies it."

That was easy for Eric to picture. It gave a new concept. We don't have to work so hard to be closer to God nor work at trying to perfect ourselves; He can draw us to Himself if we just get in His presence and allow Him entrance into our thoughts and heart, then the "Father of lights" will cleanse us within "from all unrighteousness" and bring us into closer union with Him.

Next he read:

"The soul, faithfully exercising itself in the affection and love of its God, is astonished to find Him taking complete possession of it. His presence becomes so natural, that it would be impossible not to have it: it becomes habitual to the soul, which is also conscious of a great calm spreading over it."

Eric thinking what a difference this thought is to the busy stress of the modern Christmas season and finishing up of the year's work projects. He repeats those words, "A great calm spreading over it."

"That would be wonderful—and it should be that way. As we take time to think of the Lord, and are in His presence, instead of the madness of life, we could be enjoying great peace—a calm. Hmm. There's wisdom in these words penned over 300 years ago."

This reminded him of something else Madam Guyon wrote that was printed in a book many years ago called, "Daily Strength for Daily Needs", by Mary W. Tileston.

“Possess yourself as much as you possibly can in peace; not by any effort, but by letting all things fall to the ground which trouble or excite you. This is no work, but is, as it were, a setting down a fluid to settle that has become turbid through agitation.” –Madam Guyon

He could imagine the object lesson she was giving here, if he used the example of one of those little Christmas toys that are bottles, dome- or ball-shaped glass and when you shake it up there is a flurry of snowflakes swirling all around and then they fall gently on the wintery scene. When it has been held still, the flakes all settle and the miniature model inside is clearly seen.

Eric continued to read:

“But man is so attached to his own works, that he cannot believe God is working, unless he can feel, know, and distinguish His operation. He does not see that it is the speed of his course which prevents his seeing...”

He stopped short and got a jolt, “Speaking of work, I better get back to it!”

Eric got up and made his way to prepare the final tray for the Christmas party. However, while doing so, his heart pained a bit as he knew the extreme hardship Madam Guyon was about to go through, but then he took courage.

It was almost as if he heard the words read to him that she had penned during the time when her freedom was taken.

*A little bird am I
Shut in from fields of air;
Yet in my cage I sit and sing
To Him Who placed me there;
Well pleased His prisoner to be
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.*

*Naught have I else to do,
I sing the whole day long;
And He Whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song.
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He loves to hear me sing.*

*Thou hast an ear to hear,
A heart to love and bless;
And, though my notes were e'er so rude,
Thou wouldst not hear the less;
Because Thou knowest, as they fall,
That same sweet love inspired them all.*

*My cage confines me round;
Abroad I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart's at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul.*

*O, it is good to soar
These bolts and bars above
To Him Whose purpose I adore,
Whose Providence I love,
And in Thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom, of the mind.*

-- Madam Guyon

As Eric brought in the last tray of food and served the final round of drinks, he looked at those there. They might not have known where Madam Guyon was right at that moment, but there were a few other things they didn't know as well.

They didn't know she wouldn't allow the coming hardship to crush her. Her love for Jesus was strong enough to go through the fires of any testing. And just as God knew where she was right then and was with her when she was free, He would also be with her when she wasn't.

Prison walls wouldn't keep her dearest One, Jesus Christ her beloved, from entering in and being with her. After all, He too had tasted the wrath of the so-called religious ones, because He dared to preach love and forgiveness of sins—and that it is granted for free at that! He dared to invite all who wanted to, to be His friend, and to live forever with Him. Those who thought differently couldn't tolerate that kind of message getting out; but nothing could stop it.

Millions of brave ones, including Madam Guyon, have carried on doing as Jesus commissioned those who love Him to do—to tell others of His love and His Words and His welcoming invitation to Heaven.

Eric took heart as he knew that in time, she would be set free again, free to spend her last aging years living in peace, writing, telling others of Jesus, and would love and praise Him until her last moments on Earth—and of course, beyond.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8

From one home to the next Eric was mysteriously transferred in his dreams. He now found himself no longer in France, but at the door of the Woolsthorpe manor in England.

The calendar was somewhat different as you go back in time. But when Eric arrived at this next Christmas in the past, it was December 25th according to the calendar used at the time in that place.

As Eric entered the Woolsthorpe manor, he heard a woman softly sobbing. Not only was he invisible but he seemed to be able to read her thoughts. Her mind was on her wedding day not yet a year ago. Next, he saw her thoughts taking her to when she first found out she was with child.

The woman, Hannah, had fond thoughts of their months together as a couple, and a happy thought of being a family with their first child. Her thoughts then were muddled and she didn't understand what fate had suddenly befallen them. Now, here she sat, holding their very tiny baby who was prematurely born—she must face this alone, she thought. Her husband, the child's father had passed away three months before. Hannah named the baby after his father: Isaac.

Things indeed were very different than she had imagined they would be, and there was little hope of the child even surviving. He was so small and weak that few believed he would make it.

But now, through her tears, this woman was praying and asking God to look down kindly to her and to her infant that was born on Christmas Day—just as He had looked after His own Son born on Earth on that very first Christmas.

Eric knew that God heard her prayer, and he wished he had a way of communicating to her just how wonderfully her prayers would be answered. Though her child was now so weak and fragile, he would become the famous scientist: Isaac Newton. Eric invisibly leaned over and stroked the little one's cheek and whispered, "You're going to be alright, buddy! Just hang in there. And a happy first Christmas to you! The world needs what you will one day bring to it."

Eric pondered, "What is it that makes a child grow up into a noble person? I guess this just proves that it doesn't take having two perfect parents, who are there for you all the time. So that gives hope for the many in the world that are sadly enduring less than idyllic conditions.

Taking Isaac's life for example, though his mother remarried, Isaac was raised much of the time by his grandmother and other relatives. Then, almost as if in answer to his question he remembered a quotation from Isaac Newton:

"All my discoveries have been made in answer to prayer. I can take my telescope and look millions of miles into space; but I can go away to my room and in prayer get nearer to God and Heaven than I can when assisted by all the telescopes of Earth."

It was like the click of a key opening a lock. It dawned on Eric that the basic and most essential element for a life of

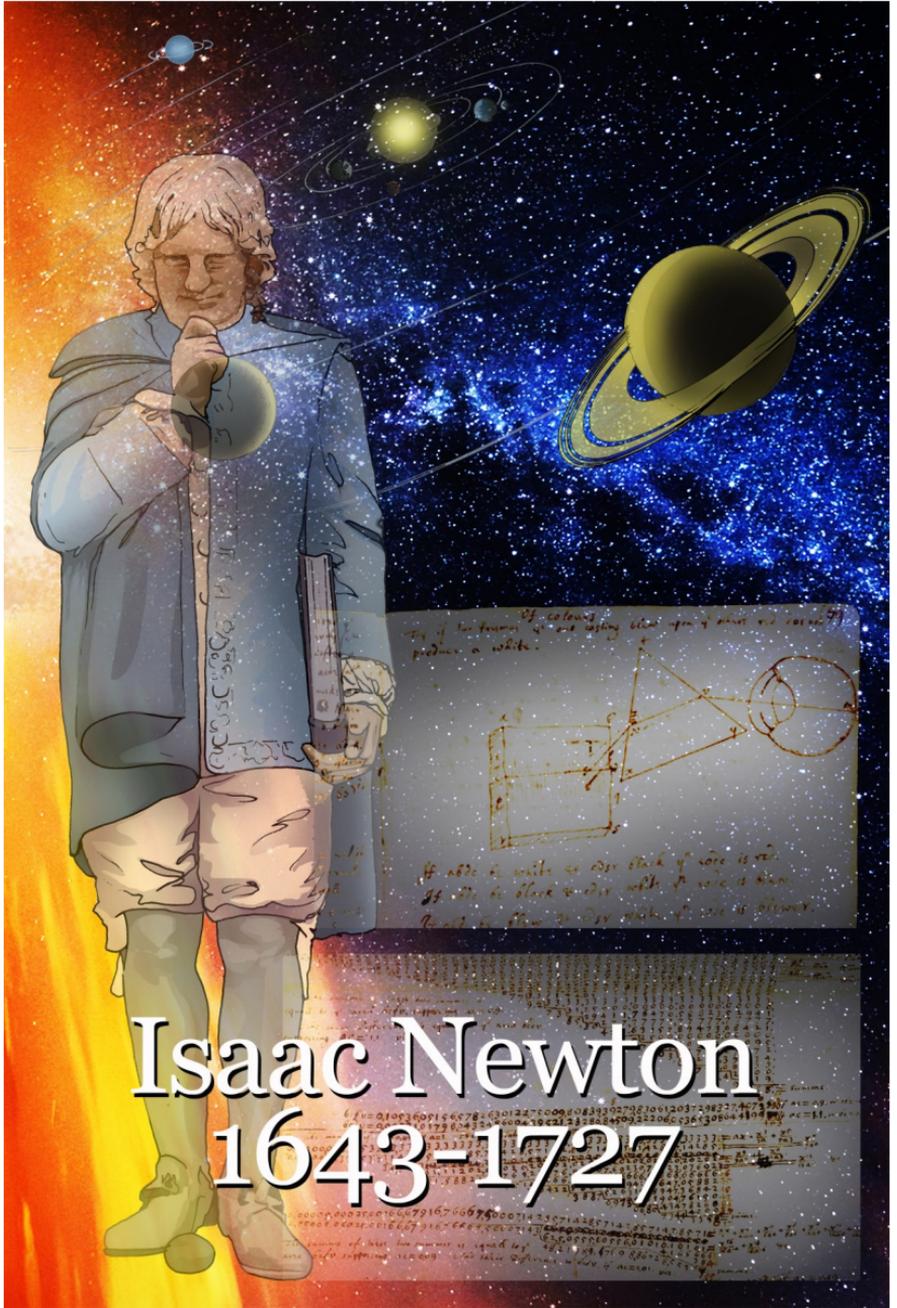
noteworthy success—not just world acclaim, but true and good success for fellowman and the world—is to be in connection with the Creator of it all.

Isaac, in his desperation leaned on God as His Heavenly Father and looked to Him and the Bible for guidance. As a result, he gained answers to his scientific questions, made amazing discoveries, and was free to follow his particular path of destiny, with God as His guide. Perhaps even better than he might have, had if he leaned instead heavily and solely on human knowledge and emotional support.

That first Christmas in 1642, it may have seemed that all was going against his becoming anything great, or even just surviving. But just as Isaac found out in his own life, so his mother also found out that with God on your side, and you on God's side, prayer can turn even the most hopeless situation into one that far surpasses all hopes and dreams.

Would this have happened naturally, without any help from anyone, or any prayers sent up to Heaven? Would Isaac have automatically become the noble "Sir Isaac Newton" just like that, bing? No, Isaac himself knew that any success in discoveries; any health he had; all the difficulties he was able to make it through, was due to his dependence and communication with God.

Eric looked at the little baby now sleeping in his mother's arms, as she tried to lie back and get some rest, what a good example it shows of a believer in the arms of their Creator. He mused: a baby knows it needs helps and is dependent on the one caring for them; and so should we be, as well, with our Heavenly Father.



Isaac Newton

1643-1727

With that Eric stroked the woman's brow before leaving and said, wishing that in her dreams she could hear him say, "Be brave. He'll make it." He knew that with God's help and the loving care of this mother for her infant, the little one would survive and grow from being a newborn to an older baby, and from then to a toddler and an active young child eager to discover and learn about the world around him. And where humans couldn't meet his inner needs, God would be watching over him, talking to him, taking him by the hand and leading Him along. It was through his looking to God throughout his life that he would become the man he was destined to be.

Eric stepped out of the manor house and into the cold, but the feel of Christmas time and being in England reminded him of the words to one of the oldest known English Christmas carols. It was written by Ritson in about 1410 AD:

*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 keep a knave child (knave: boy)
That softly slept; she sat and sung:
Lullay, lulla, balow,
My bairn, sleep softly now.*

There's a quite a history behind the tradition of singing songs on Christmas as a way to remember the joy of the birth of Jesus. Eric had done a study on it some years back and had been most surprised to discover how many times down throughout history the singing of joyful songs at Christmas was suppressed or banned, and by those attempting to keep things "religious".

Thankfully, like trying to hold a handful of water, you can't keep it for long. Rather than the joy of Christmas being expressed in song vanishing, it spread around the world to other places where it was allowed, and many new songs were written.

Just like it happened in the past, however, so does it still happen today: not every song used as a "Christmas Carol" is actually in praise about Jesus' coming to Earth. But thankfully, down throughout the centuries new songs were written and sung and made known to each new generation.

These songs declared the news and shared the joy of the coming of God's Son to the world. And good, older traditional carols have also still been learned and sung heartily at Christmas, down through the years.

So although at times the true meaning of Christmas gets lost in the singing of secular festive songs (as such a tradition used to dominate the season before Christ and Christmas became the focus) still there are many devoted ones that sing, with joy, the beautiful songs that make Christmas the heart-warming time it can be when the reason for the season is not misplaced.

An excerpt of Eric's study compilation read:

"Even Martin Luther contributed to the singing of Carols, and in 1539 he composed the song, 'From Heaven Above to Earth I Come' ('Vom Himmel hoch, do komm'ich her'). Luther wrote this hymn for the Christmas Eve festival held annually at his house. A man dressed as an angel customarily sang the opening verses. Music, written by Handel and Mendelssohn, was adapted and it became a popular Christmas carol." (Facts from, "Canadian Christmas Traditions: Festive Recipes and Stories From Coast to Coast" by DeeAnn Mandryk)

"Perhaps one of the most notable endeavours in the realm of the use of songs to celebrate Christmas was started with a passion in the heart of St. Francis of Assisi. He longed to let people know and visualise—most who didn't have the chance as we do today: to sit down and read the Christmas story from the Bible—just what the first Christmas really was like. He wanted to bring the joy of Christmas into people's hearts and lives, and he did this through his heartfelt retelling of the story of Jesus' birth; through the writing and singing of Christmas carols sung to lively and danceable tunes, possibly even in Italian, rather than the more drab tunes and chants with Latin lyrics; as well as setting up what is known as the first life-size Nativity scene, using real animals, a man and woman for Mary and Joseph, and a wax figure for the 'Babe of Bethlehem'.

"St. Francis wrote a Christmas hymn called: Psalmus in Nativitate. Later, the first Franciscan friars contributed a large number of Italian Christmas carols. Here is the English translation of one of these thirteenth-century Italian carols.

“The tune has become very familiar as the theme on which Handel developed his Pastoral Symphony in the Messiah:

In Bethlehem is born the Holy Child,
On hay and straw in the winter wild;
O, my heart is full of mirth
At Jesus' birth.

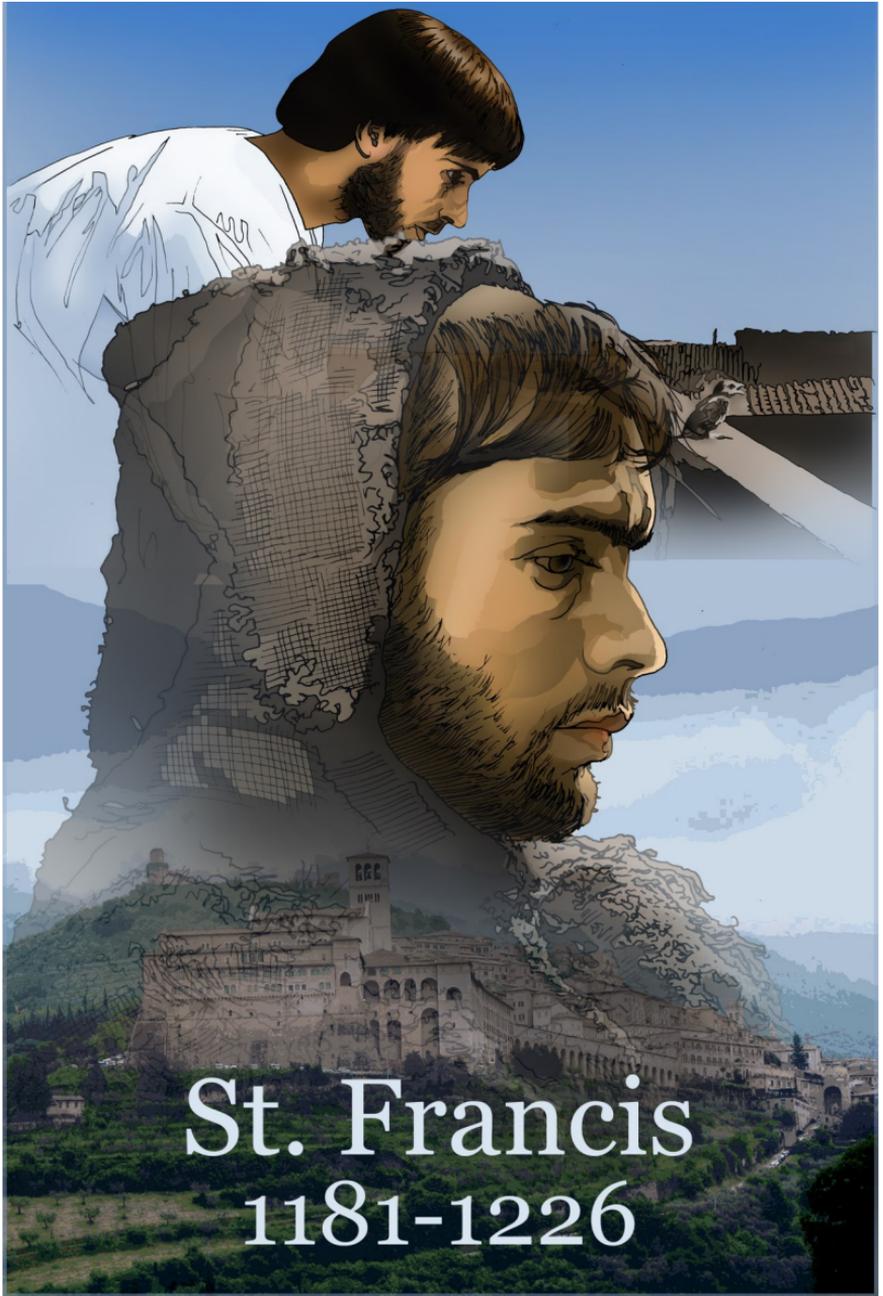
(From <http://italian.about.com/library/weekly/aa120600b.htm>)

(End of Eric's study compilation excerpt.)

Eric had always thought that a re-enactment being performed, of St. Francis' Christmas Celebrations, in every neighbourhood at Christmas time—rather than the emphasis on Christmas shopping—would have a positive effect, worldwide.

This year Eric finally decided to do something about it. During the first couple weeks of December he and his sister Elizabeth, wrote out a script. They imagined that a narrator could read it, while others were players acting it out, or posing.

It would be easy for a team of actors and their collection of props to travel around and set up and perform this presentation in any country. All they'd need was a translation of the script and a native speaker of the country to read it aloud to the onlookers, and perhaps some borrowed local animals.



St. Francis

1181-1226

When Eric woke to see that he was still in Ireland and continuing on his journey by train, he pulled out a folder from his bag and opened it to look over the script he'd brought to show his Aunt and Uncle.

“As St. Francis of Assisi sat under a tree, wrapped in his cloak for warmth, overlooking the countryside, tears ran down his face. It was nearly the time of year when a most wonderful event of world’s history took place; the time that all, old and young, rich and poor, of all nations across the world should be rejoicing with true celebrations.

“It was nearly Christmas time, in the year 1223. What was planned for the Christmas festivities that year? Nothing, really. There certainly would be no joyful and lively Christmas carols sung, for they hadn’t yet been written. Nor would there be any Nativity scenes around, as that hadn’t been thought of yet. But that was all to change after that time St. Francis sat in prayer.

“He lifted up his eyes to heaven, imagining what the Heavenly host, the Angelic Choir might have sounded like, and he knew at that moment in his heart that we on Earth, too, should be singing praises in honour of the birth of the Son of God, on the very first Christmas.

“But how can one truly sing and give honour for something they knew little or nothing about? Since the common folks didn’t understand much Latin, and all the Church masses were conducted in Latin, even attending a service wouldn’t really give them the idea of what happened the night Jesus Christ was born.

“People learn more from seeing than from being told. Their eyes will remember for years what their ears have more readily forgotten.

“St. Francis was getting more and more excited about the ideas that it seemed God was transmitting right to his thoughts. As he got up and walked down the grassy pathway he saw sheep grazing on the nearby hill. ‘Yes, how perfect! Just like it was in Bethlehem! This will be a part of the plan,’ he thought.

“He mentally began going through a list of all that would be needed, and in a spirit of prayer asked His Heavenly Father what He wanted done for this special demonstration to the people of the village of the first Christmas. For the animals needed to display the stable setting, he would ask his friend. It would be within sight of the grazing sheep. For Mary and Joseph, he would employ friends that could play the part well.

“Baby Jesus would need to be made, perhaps out of wax, and he would inquire and find someone who could do this task well, and wrap the little figure in ‘swaddling clothes’. A manger would need to be constructed, and hay gathered. A song to sing that would inspire those that passed by, would need to be composed, and for this he would call for God’s divine help. It would be unlike other songs sung in the Church at that time. It would have a cheery ring to it.

“With prayer and the help of friends, the plan was brought into being. When it was time for Christ’s Mass—the ‘Christmas’ event in the Church, everything was set up.

“As people came to Mass, or simply passed by, they were enthralled to see and hear the very first live Nativity scene. St. Francis told the story to the onlookers, with tears of joy and tenderness, about the birth of the ‘Babe of Bethlehem’ while they looked on and saw the Holy family in a stable setting, with farm animals around, and sheep grazing on the hill.

“St. Francis sang a new song in a carol’s rhythm, style, and tune, but with words about God’s gift of love to the world at Christmas. And thus was the birth of ‘Christmas carols’, and Nativity scenes. Inside the church, afterwards, St. Francis then spoke to those who had come to worship, and delivered a heartfelt message that flowed from an inner wellspring of love for the Saviour.

“A memorable Christmas it was for all there, so much so, that the ideas of this new way to express Christmas joy swept through the land and beyond to surrounding countries. And still to this day the ripples are felt. As songs are sung, and Nativity scenes are set up, we can remember that the tradition began because of a man whose love for Jesus and his desire to inspire the hearts of others to love and worship God, was willing to try something new.”

CHRISTMAS DAY AT VESPERS—A compiled Psalm of praise, by St. Francis of Assisi, to be use at Christmas.

(References are according to Douay-Rheims translation)

Psalm 80: 2. Rejoice to God our helper.

Psalm 46: 2. Shout unto God, living and true, with the voice of triumph.

Psalm 46: 3. For the Lord is high, terrible: a great king over all the earth.

For the most holy Father of heaven, our king, before ages sent His Beloved Son from on high and He was born of the Blessed Virgin, holy Mary.

Psalm 88: 27. He shall cry out to me: Thou art my Father;

Psalm 88: 28. And I will make Him My Firstborn, high above the kings of the earth.

Psalm 41: 9. In the day time the Lord hath commanded His mercy: and a canticle to Him in the night.

Psalm 117: 24. This is the day which the Lord hath made: let us rejoice and be glad in it.

For the beloved and most holy Child has been given to us and born for us by the wayside.

Luke 2: 7. And laid in a manger because He had no room in the inn.

Luke 2: 14. Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.

Psalm 95: 11. Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, and let the sea be moved and the fulness thereof.

Psalm 95:12. The fields shall rejoice and all that are in them.

Psalm 95: 1. Sing to Him a new canticle; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Psalm 95: 4. For the Lord is great and exceedingly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods.

Psalm 95: 7. Bring to the Lord, O ye kindreds of the gentiles, bring to the Lord glory and honor.

Psalm 95: 8. Bring to the Lord glory unto His Name. Bring your own bodies and bear His holy cross and follow His most holy precepts even unto the end.

(From: "The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi, tr. by Paschal Robinson, [1905]; http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/wosf/wosf23.htm#page_155)

Just as as Eric finished re-reading over his script, the train then pulled up to Monasterevin station, or, Mhainistir Eibhin, in Gaelic. A woman and her young child got off the train at this stop, and a gentleman who came aboard took the seat, which was near to where Eric was sitting. He seemed in a talkative mood.

He looked over at Eric, who gave him a "good day" nod. The gentleman then began, "Did you know this station that was built here in the town of Monasterevin, in Kildare, and finished 26th of June 1847, was built during the great potato famine?"

Eric had heard much about that sad time, and piped in,

"Guess some people got work and a bit of food during that time, though I'm sure not under the most ideal circumstances. I heard many were cruelly evicted from their homes due to the famine and the poverty it brought, being unable to pay rent. Is that true?"

The gentleman answered,

"I think at first the land owners tried to be sympathetic, but as the blight spread more and more, and less and less

potatoes were harvested, everyone suffered terribly from famine and lack of finances. Rent couldn't be paid for the better part of a few years. I guess times of terrible distress and disaster brings out the true character of a person.

"I heard that there was a good landlord who did just the opposite. Not only did he pity those living on his land in Ireland, and not require rent during that time, but he sent them funds and even cows to provide milk for their children. I'm sure the good Lord put that in his heart."

Eric agreed, and looked out the window to catch the scenery as the train was on its way again.

He then asked, "So what's it like here in Monasterevin?"

The gentleman explained more about the area as they journeyed on, "The landscape around there is flatter and boggier than in other parts of the country. The town is small with Georgian houses and has so many bridges that it has become known as the Venice of Ireland. Ever been to Venice?"

Eric shook his head. He hadn't.

The man continued,

"In the 6th century, St. Albany of New Ross gave the monastic settlement, by the banks of the river Barrow, to his protégé, Evin. Evin made Monasterevin a sanctuary. He co-authored the 'Tripartite Life of St. Patrick,' and also wrote the 'Cain Emhin.'

"Moore Abbey was built in 1767. This huge mansion-like house with many window, estate-like in appearance has a long pathway through green lawns leading up to the

building. It later became home to the great Irish tenor, Count John McCormack, from 1925 to about 1938.”

Eric knew about Count John McCormack, and had read in a biography about his time living there,

“John and Lily decided they must have a home in the old country. Their choice finally fell upon Moore Abbey, near Monasterevan, in the county of Kildare. This beautiful house was originally a monastery. Then it became the ancestral seat of the Earls of Drogheda. Because of its origins, there was something peculiarly appropriate in its coming into the possession of so devout a son of Mother Church as John.

“The McCormacks took a great delight in their Irish home. It was a home to be proud of and not least of its joys was that it gave John the chance to sing regularly the music of the Mass in the church at Monasterevan, with his family round him.

“For a decade Moore Abbey was well known to musicians, artists, and the crowd of notabilities that were the McCormacks' guests.” (From, “The Story of a Singer” by L. A. G. Strong)

The gentleman continued,

“Today, Moore Abbey is now a convent to The Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary. They bought Moore Abbey in 1945, and since then have use it to house and help many people in need of special care. However, they seemed to be off to a rough start, as only two years after purchasing the property a fire broke out in the west wing. Thankfully, it was brought under control and they recovered from that.



Monasterevin Station



Moore Abby

“Actually, nowadays, a lot of people from Monasterevin work in Moore Abbey. It has become a home for the mentally disabled. There is also a daytime workshop for clients from County Kildare and County Laois.”

Conversing made the time pass pleasantly, and before too long the train was entering Kildare. The gentleman then slouched and put some time into sending some Christmas greeting texts and made a few calls to those he planned to meet up with when in Dublin.

Eric turned to the lady beside him who seemed keen to catch up on some chat time and glad for someone to express her thoughts to. Eric listened casually while looking out the window at the passing scenes.

“I've always loved the journey to Dublin by rail or by road because once you get to Kildare, there, in my humble opinion, a change of atmosphere occurs. Perhaps it's because it's such a beautiful town or that it's so steeped in a history that feels alive, even today.”

This lady's friend added her own two cents to the knowledge bank:

“Did you know that Kildare dates from the 5th century when it was the site of a church, founded by St. Brigid, called the Church of the Oak? A monastery was also founded here by St. Brigid. It was one of the most important Christian foundations in Celtic Ireland.”

“I don't know much about St. Brigid...” Eric admitted, and the eager-to-inform lady was happy to oblige with her own collection of facts she'd stored, for moments like this, and said,

“St. Brigid was Christian but was reared by her father with his other children by his, lawful, wife. Early in her life she vowed to live a life of holy chastity. Saint Mel of Ardagh and Bishop McCaille are credited with consecrating Brigid. After that, an oak tree was planted on a hill of the Curragh, hence the town's name, Cill Dara. Saint Brigid's Cathedral was built around 1223 AD, and is another breathtaking building in Kildare. Its denomination is Church of Ireland.”

The gentleman who was now finished with his phone activities abruptly sat up and piped in with a smile,

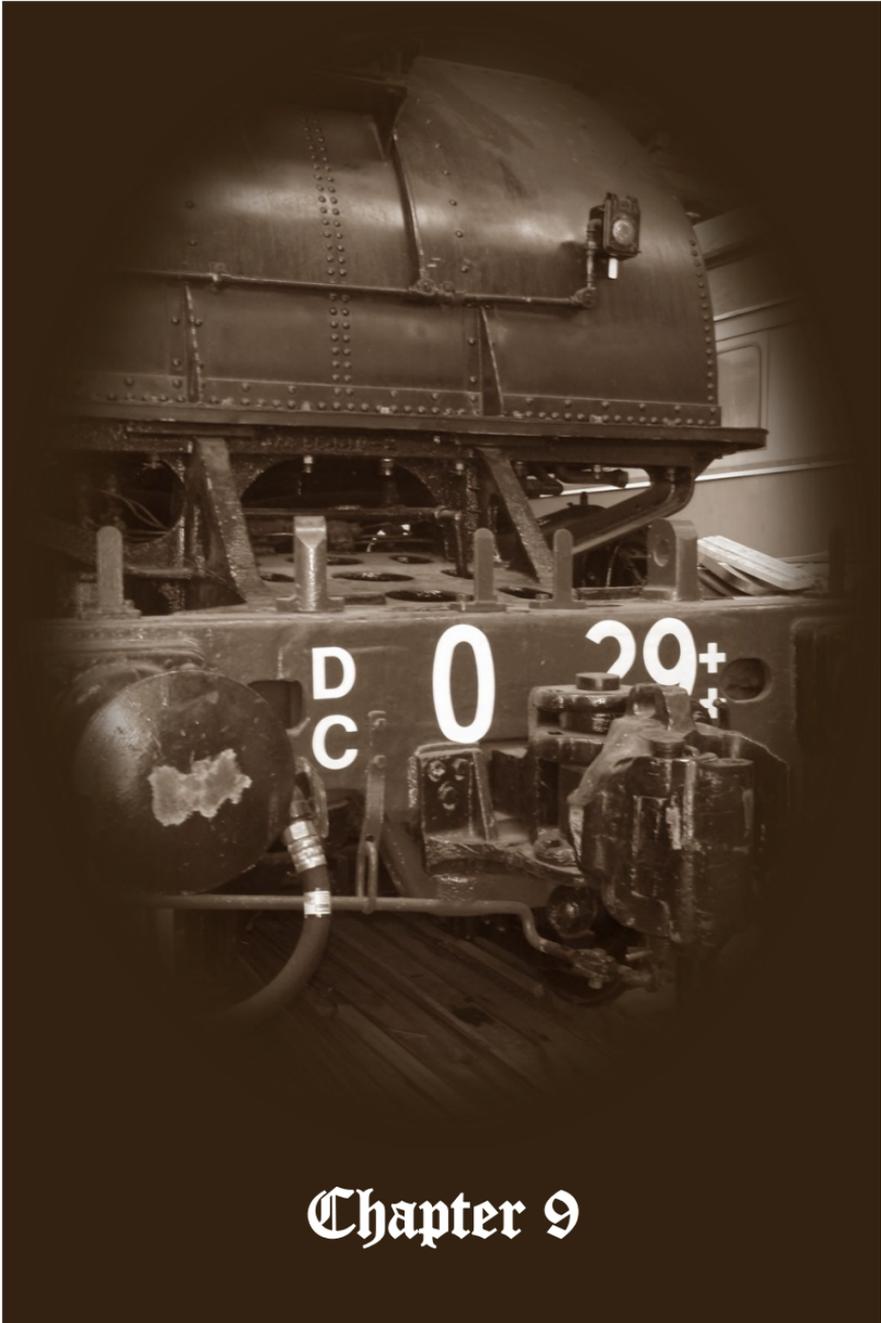
“We can't forget *The Irish National Stud*, which is a thoroughbred horse breeding facility in Tully, County Kildare. The Curragh Racetrack is famous all over the world with people coming from all over the globe to race their horses there. Kildare is very flat and apart from another place in the West of Ireland, it's probably one of the only places—besides Connemara—where sheep have the right of way on the roads!”

Everyone had a chuckle, and then seemed to settle down into their private thoughts for awhile.

Eric ponders this Kildare's interesting history, landmarks, and its unique landscape. Out the window he sees sheep in the distance, and a fog is lying low on the land, with the morning Sun projecting a rosy light. He remembers when his uncle came with him and Elizabeth here to visit the beautiful the Japanese Gardens. He wouldn't mind walking through them right now, as he imagines how they must look heavenly in this morning's light.

Looking at his watch Eric sees that he'd be in Dublin in about half an hour. Feeling happy and festive, yet still rather tired, thinks perhaps he should prepare for the Christmas events by having a wee more shut-eye time.

Eric's memories take him back to when he was a child. His first holiday ever was spent in Dublin, and he remembers on that trip his mother warming his little hands, and seeing his father's face red with cold. He and his sister felt as though they'd just had the privilege of flying in a Concorde!



Chapter 9

Chapter 9

“Oh, I forgot,” Eric thought to himself while he sat up abruptly and began looking through his bag, “I was going to read those greeting cards that just arrived in my mailbox this morning. I tucked them away as I was on my way out the door. Here they are!”

The first card had a lovely picture of the stable and the star of Bethlehem in the sky over head. The stars nearly twinkled as it was made with glittery sparkles. Inside it said in Gaelic:

Nollaig faoi shéan is faoi shaonas duit! (*A happy and a prosperous Christmas to you!*)

It was signed in pen with a few other personal well-wishes for Eric at this time of year, and for the coming New Year as well.

Eric then jotted on the envelope the date it was received and from whom, and that he had yet to return thanks for it.

As a rule he liked being prompt with those who corresponded with him, and usually tried to do so within a week. With dates clearly marked, he could keep track of the passage of time and which letter, note, or card was the most timely to send a reply to. However, over the Christmas season there were always many friends to reply to, and sometimes it took a bit longer to get around to writing them all.

The next card's cover had an artistically written Irish Christmas prayer, with decorative holly and candles painted around. It said:

*The light of the Christmas star to you
The warmth of home and hearth to you
The cheer and good will of friends and will to you
The love of the Son and God's peace to you*

Inside was a handwritten note scripting the blessing Eric well knew, "Beannachtaí na Nollag duit!"

(The blessings of Christmas be with you!)

It was signed with all the names of the members of the family, from the young ones to the parents. Eric smiled at their thoughtfulness. He'd stayed with this family over the summer last year to help them out, as they were facing some health and financial challenges.

The little ones had enjoyed the stories, jokes, and funny acts that Eric could put on for them. He thought that if he could at least inspire some smiles and the medicine of laughter, they'd get through the tight spot a whole lot better.

When it was time for Eric to leave, the family promised to write him, and had kept their word. Two Christmases in a row now they had sent him a simple but heartfelt card.

Eric made his usual notation on the envelope and then opened the final card.

This one was different than the others. The cover was designed to appear as if the card was a present wrapped in dark green a paper with a gold shiny ribbon. Eric relaxed and leaned back as he sipped some water and began to silently read the poem written inside:

ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

I arise to-day

Through the strength of heaven:

Light of sun,

Radiance of moon,

Splendour of fire,

Speed of lightning,

Swiftness of wind,

Depth of sea,

Stability of earth,

Firmness of rock.

I arise to-day

Through God's strength to pilot me:

God's might to uphold me,

God's wisdom to guide me,

God's eye to look before me,

God's ear to hear me,

God's word to speak for me,

God's hand to guard me,

God's way to lie before me,

God's shield to protect me,

God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptations of vices,
From every one who shall wish me ill,
Afar and anear,
Alone and in a multitude.
Christ to shield me to-day
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me abundance of reward.
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I
arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
I arise to-day
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of Creation.
--By Kuno Meyer

Eric closed the card, as well as his eyes. He liked what the poetic lines expressed, and wanted to ponder what it said. Before long, a vision started to appear in his mind's eye.

The vision played like a mental movie with Eric having nothing to do with its scenes.

A man called Patrick was sitting in the drizzling rain under the semi-shelter of a tree. He had been praying for a long while about how to bring the knowledge and the acceptance of God to the people he came to help. Then at last, as he looked down, his eyes latched on to the perfect iconic example. *Yes! This was what the people—and even a child—could understand.* He picked a shamrock, a clover.

In his own heart he understood the meaning of the scripture “three that bear witness in Heaven”—God the Father, Jesus God’s Son, and the Holy Spirit of God. (1 John 5:7) Yet how was he to help the common folks understand that there aren’t multiple gods to worship? There was the one true God that they needed to turn to.

There are three leaves joined to a single stem on a clover; this could help to describe the three divine elements of God in the Trinity. Each leaf on the clover had the shape of a heart, which could also represent the love that God has; for the scriptures say, “God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

Tears streamed down Patrick’s face, as he felt the presence of God leading him in his mission. Slowly he got up and began walking down the hill. With a praise in his heart and a wreath of smiles on his face he held this precious symbol in his hand.

It was in the taking of little steps, of little ideas passed on, of helping one heart at a time to come to know Jesus' love and God's pardon for those who receive His Spirit in their hearts, that this land and its inhabitants would be changed for the better.

At this point in the vision Eric felt himself enter the scene and began to take part in it. First of all, Eric found himself walking up a lushly greened hill, shoes wet through from the grass. He looked up and saw the man from the vision coming down towards him. Patrick placed his hand on Eric's shoulder and in a gentle voice spoke, while showing Eric the clover with the other hand. "Do you know what this is?"

Eric nodded. He knew for certain now where he was, and with whom he was speaking.

Before Eric could say more, Patrick proceeded to explain the mystery of the Godhead in such a simple way, using the three-leaved clover as a demonstration. The sincerity in his voice and the tender look of his moist eyes showed Eric how much it meant to him that others come to know the God he loved and served.

They said goodbye and each continued on their way. When Eric got to the top of the small hill he looked at the verdant scene around him. It felt odd to be experiencing what it was like in his own country, many centuries before.

Eric remembered the various stories, history, and legends that had been attributed to this sincere, determined, yet humble man he had just encountered. He would have loved to spend hours talking with him, so that legendary points of history could be verified or clarified—even though at this

point in time that he entered into, some of those events might not have happened yet. How he would have loved to encourage St. Patrick that due to his efforts—and the efforts of others to tell people the good news of Jesus, that in the future, Ireland would thoroughly enjoy Christmas and remember its meaning.

Though through the passage of time, some stories had changed from the reality to taking on a more legendary slant, there was one thing that Eric could count on as being true—the document or writing that St. Patrick wrote towards the end of his life. This handwritten document was copied by hand by others many times over the years and preserved.

Eric had found out that there are eight known manuscripts in existence still now, and the oldest one from 807 AD is in the Book of Armagh in Trinity College, Dublin. Eric had, however, read the version that had been translated into English.

The words of this honest account of St. Patrick's life showed a peek into the heart and passion of a man, who though unlearned by worldly standards, was determined to make a marked difference in this beautiful isle.

St. Patrick truly gave his all to them, as he wrote: “I spend myself for you, so that you may have me for yours.”

He cared very much about the One who just about 400 years before had also given His life, His all, and St. Patrick was determined to do no less for Him, so that the gift Jesus came to give would not be unrealized and unaccepted.

As Eric recalled some of the things St. Patrick had written, it was almost as if he was hearing it whispered to him by Patrick himself:

“My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many.

“My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God.

“I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others. We deserved this, because we had gone away from God, and did not keep his commandments. We would not listen to our priests, who advised us about how we could be saved. The Lord brought his strong anger upon us, and scattered us among many nations even to the ends of the earth. It was among foreigners that it was seen how little I was.

“It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late, I recognised my failings. So I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy on my youthful ignorance. He guarded me before I knew him, and before I came to wisdom and could distinguish between good and evil. He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son.

“That is why I cannot be silent – nor would it be good to do so – about such great blessings and such a gift that the

Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity. This is how we can repay such blessings, when our lives change and we come to know God, to praise and bear witness to his great wonders before every nation under heaven.

“This is because there is no other God, nor will there ever be, nor was there ever, except God the Father. He is the one who was not begotten, the one without a beginning, the one from whom all beginnings come, the one who holds all things in being – this is our teaching. And his son, Jesus Christ, whom we testify has always been, since before the beginning of this age, with the father in a spiritual way. He was begotten in an indescribable way before every beginning.

“Everything we can see, and everything beyond our sight, was made through him. He became a human being; and, having overcome death, was welcomed to the heavens to the Father. The Father gave him all power over every being, both heavenly and earthly and beneath the earth.

“Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ, in whom we believe and whom we await to come back to us in the near future, is Lord and God. He is judge of the living and of the dead; he rewards every person according to their deeds.

“He has generously poured on us the Holy Spirit, the gift and promise of immortality, who makes believers and those who listen to be children of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is the one we acknowledge and adore – one God in a trinity of the sacred name.

“In the knowledge of this faith in the Trinity, and without letting the dangers prevent it, it is right to make known the

gift of God and his eternal consolation. It is right to spread abroad the name of God faithfully and without fear, so that even after my death I may leave something of value to the many thousands of my brothers and sisters – the children whom I baptised in the Lord.

“After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realise now, the spirit was burning in me at that time.

“It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: ‘You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country.’

“Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: ‘Look – your ship is ready.’ It was not nearby, but a good two hundred miles away. I had never been to the place, nor did I know anyone there. So I ran away then, and left the man with whom I had been for six years. It was in the strength of God that I went – God who turned the direction of my life to good; I feared nothing while I was on the journey to that ship.

“The day I arrived, the ship was about to leave the place. I said I needed to set sail with them, but the captain was not at all pleased. He replied unpleasantly and angrily: “Don’t you dare try to come with us.”

“When I heard that, I left them and went back to the hut where I had lodgings. I began to pray while I was going; and before I even finished the prayer, I heard one of them shout aloud at me: ‘Come quickly – those men are calling you!’ I turned back right away, and they began to say to me: ‘Come – we’ll trust you. Prove you’re our friend in any way you wish.’

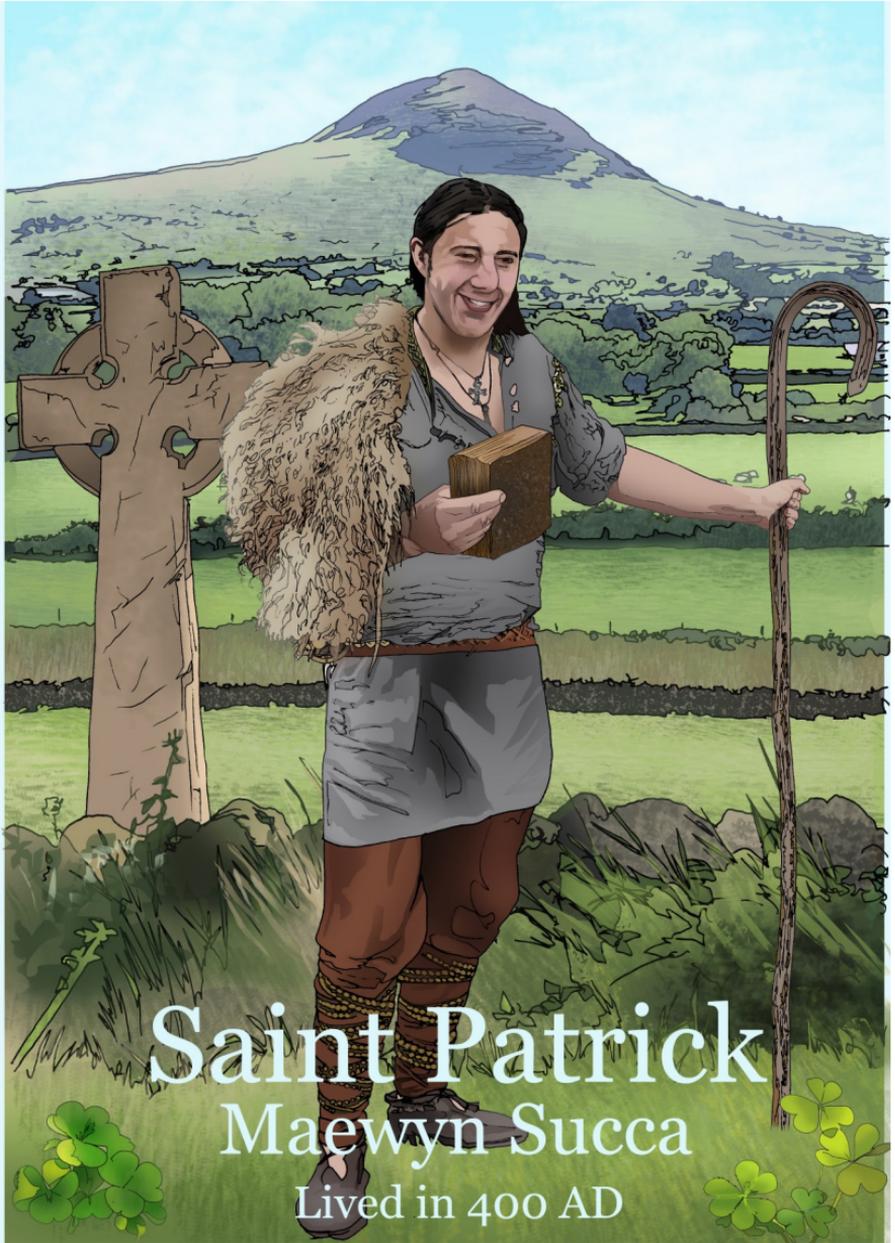
“They were pagans, and I hoped they might come to faith in Jesus Christ. This is how I got to go with them, and we set sail right away.

“After three days we made it to land, and then for twenty eight days we travelled through a wilderness.

“A few years later I was again with my parents in Britain. They welcomed me as a son, and they pleaded with me that, after all the many tribulations I had undergone, I should never leave them again.

“It was while I was there that I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with so many letters they could not be counted. He gave me one of these, and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the Irish people.

“While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: ‘We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.’ This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further; I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for.



Saint Patrick

Maewyn Succa

Lived in 400 AD

“So I’ll never stop giving thanks to my God.

“He is the one who defended me in all my difficulties. I can say: Who am I, Lord, or what is my calling, that you have worked with me with such divine presence? This is how I come to praise and magnify your name among the nations all the time, wherever I am, not only in good times but in the difficult times too. Whatever comes about for me, good or bad, I ought to accept them equally and give thanks to God.

“He has shown me that I can put my faith in him without wavering and without end. However ignorant I am, he has heard me, so that in these late days I can dare to undertake such a holy and wonderful work. In this way I can imitate somewhat those whom the Lord foretold would announce his gospel in witness to all nations before the end of the world. This is what we see has been fulfilled. Look at us: we are witnesses that the gospel has been preached right out to where there is nobody else there!

“I could wish to leave them to go to Britain. I would willingly do this, and am prepared for this, as if to visit my home country and my parents. Not only that, but I would like to go to Gaul to visit the brothers and to see the faces of the saints of my Lord. God knows what I would dearly like to do. But I am bound in the Spirit, who assures me that if I were to do this, I would be held guilty. And I fear, also, to lose the work which I began – not so much I as Christ the Lord, who told me to come here to be with these people for the rest of my life. May the Lord will it, and protect me from every wrong path, so that I do not sin before him.

“I spend myself for you, so that you may have me for yours. I have travelled everywhere among you for your own sake, in many dangers, and even to the furthest parts where nobody lived beyond, and where nobody ever went to baptise and to ordain clerics or to bring people to fulfilment. It is only by God’s gift that I diligently and most willingly did all of this for your good.

“Now I commend my soul to my most faithful God. For him I perform the work of an ambassador, despite my less than noble condition. However, God is not influenced by such personal situations, and he chose me for this task so that I would be one servant of his very least important servants.

“I pray that God give me perseverance, and that he grant me to bear faithful witness to him right up to my passing from this life, for the sake of my God.

“I testify in truth and in great joy of heart before God and his holy angels that I never had any other reason for returning to that nation from which I had earlier escaped, except the gospel and God’s promises.

“I pray for those who believe in and have reverence for God. Some of them may happen to inspect or come upon this writing which Patrick, a sinner without learning, wrote in Ireland. May none of them ever say that whatever little I did or made known to please God was done through ignorance. Instead, you can judge and believe in all truth that it was a gift of God. This is my confession before I die.

(End of excerpts from St. Patrick’s Confession [Testimonial/Life story])

It felt it right at this time and place, somewhere in the past in Ireland, to kneel down and pray, so Eric did. He was certain he was alone.

“Dear Lord, may many come to know You as the true God here in Ireland. I suspect there won’t be much in the way of Christmas celebrations this year, but with the desire in the heart of St. Patrick to lead as many as he can to You—along with others who will come later, in time, Christmas will at last be a country-wide celebration of joy.”

When Eric opened his eyes from this time of thought and prayer he was no longer on a lush, wet, green hill, but rather was back in time a century or more, in a very different location. And intuition told him that he was no longer alone.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10

“Brother!” a voice of warning called to Eric, when a hand was placed on his shoulder, as he knelt to pray on what was a lush hill in Ireland—but found out he had suddenly been transported through time and was in an altogether different location.

“They’ll see you if you pray like this out in the open! We live in very dangerous times where to give even the slightest hint of Christianity will bring you great and immediate trouble!”

Eric, compelled by the sincerity and urgency of the one imploring him to move to safety, quickly complied.

“What is your name, brother?” the stranger asked.

“I am Eric, but where may I ask, am I just now. I feel I’ve take a long journey and know not just where it has led me.”

The man, at first with hesitation then with confidence, introduced himself as Thaddeus.

“That is my Christian name, however. My Roman name I will keep to myself, for as I said, we live in particularly perilous times. Yes, sometimes I wonder if we might now already be in the time of great tribulation that our Lord spoke of.”

Eric knew, however, that the world history continued on for many more years, but he was getting an understanding that a strong and severe persecution of those holding to the Christian faith was occurring in that region.

Thaddeus continued, “We are in Asia Minor in Cappadocia, the location of the secret cities. I’ll take you where I and my family are dwelling, until such hard times pass. But we must be very careful, for if we are found out, and the secret passage way that leads to the underground dwelling place is discovered, many in hiding there will most surely be taken away.”

Eric understood the danger now and was quietly and quickly following Thaddeus and watching for anything he might motion for him to do.

Thaddeus nodded with a look in his eyes that they had reached the place they were to stop at, as the secret entrance was nearby. A lady who appeared to be selling various items and food at a table, was in fact a fellow Christian. It was here that the men were to stop and appear to be looking at what she had to sell, though in reality it was to give them a chance to pause so they could look around and see that they were not being followed or watched.

Beside her, a few meters away was a pile of belongings, bags and such, a blanket on the ground and a stick type of structure over it, with a tapestry blanket for its back wall. There was a fire pit and a jug of water, along with a donkey tied to a small tree, lazily nibbling grain and grass. To the passer-by it looked like the shelter for the woman to take a break from weather and a place to keep her supplies.

After looking over the items and communicating with the woman in a low voice for any news and to get the “all clear” Thaddeus and Eric then walked over to the stick shelter and took a drink of water.

After being completely sure of safety they slipped behind the shelter, down a hump, moved some brush out of the way and were quickly out of sight within a small cave hole. Whoever was the last to enter was to put the large clump of dry bushy branches back in place. Once into that corridor, with only a little light that shone through the branches, a large rock was rolled out of the way revealing yet another tunnel passage way.

Eric was enjoying this fascinating adventure. However, he was glad that he didn't have to endure the difficulties that came along with being a Christian at a time and in a place that attempted to stamp out belief in Jesus Christ. It was wonderful, however, to be experiencing a Christmas with those that knew what it truly meant—the coming of the Saviour to the world—and who were willing to risk their all to do so.

Thaddeus, himself a Roman by birth, was returning to this underground colony in what is now called Turkey, with some good news. Before announcing it to all, he thought to confide in Eric after they wended their way first down that tunnel, then through another room, then down some stairs, and on they went. It was dark and somewhat damp, but the oil lamps placed throughout helped one to get around. The air was rather still, but the air ducts that were cleverly constructed and placed helped to ventilate this secret dwelling place.

Thaddeus and Eric found themselves in what was essentially a kitchen. A pot was cooking on a fire stove on one side. On the other side a nanny goat was bleating; it was time for her to be milked.



**Photo of Cappadocia
By C.P.V. Gorder**

Thaddeus grabbed a handful of dry grass and some rough grain for the goat to feed on, and checked that her dish of water was still filled. He scooped away the dropping-filled hay on the ground and placed it in a box with a lid on it. It would be disposed of properly later. Thaddeus reached into a carved out tub filled with fresh straw and sprinkled a good amount in the goat's area, replacing the soiled straw he had taken away. He then poured water from a clay jug into a bowl and washed his hands before bringing an empty pot over to the nanny goat. Thaddeus pulled up a short wooden stool and began to milk the nanny goat.

Eric sat on one of the ledges that had been carved out of the rock as a shelf to put supplies on, as it was presently empty. He watched this man deftly doing the daily chore with a fully grateful heart for the wonder of God's care and provision for them.

Eric realized that though it was colder down here than above ground, still it wouldn't preserve all foods. He remembered the refrigerator back at his home, and how milk would spoil when it wasn't kept well refrigerated.

These people obviously had many skills that it seems the so-called "modern world" had lost or never learned. The facts and information about basic survival skills and homemaking were seldom passed on to successive generations in the modern world—aside from how to push buttons. With all the clever inventions of the 2000's, what need was there to learn basic survival skills?—Such as how to preserve milk or meat or vegetables naturally using nothing but salt and working with the built-in mechanisms in food, to age and preserve them in ways that not only

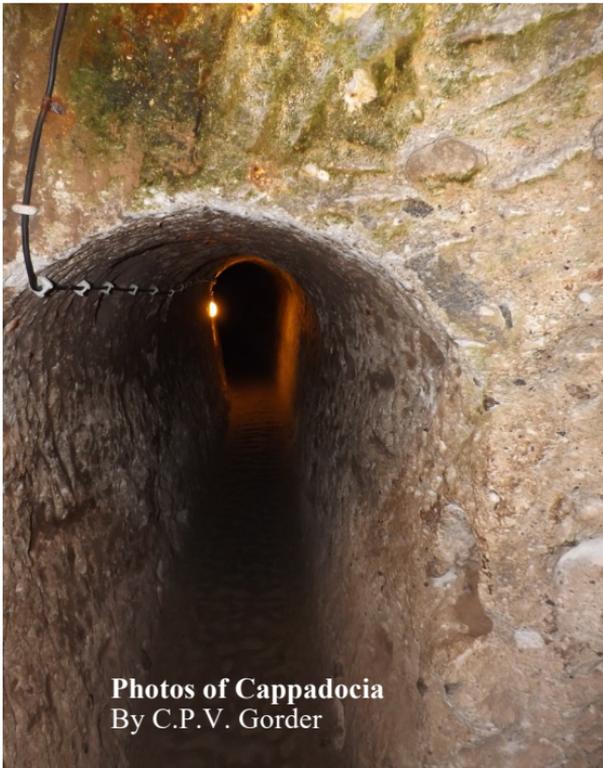
made them last longer but even gave them health-building qualities.

Thaddeus, seeing how Eric was curious to learn more about their way of living under what could seem like very rough conditions, began to explain things simply. He talked about how they would make cheese with the milk; how even that could be salted and dried for future consumption. He talked about how this underground community was set up with all the basic conveniences of living taken care of—the water, hygienic needs, animal care, disposal of waste, storage of grains and supplies, cooking needs, making clothing and blankets, providing places to sleep, ventilation and circulation of air. He even explained about the type of rock this hidden city was carved out of—volcanic rock that made it much easier for digging and scrapping than regular stone.

Eric marvelled at God’s pre-vision and “Plan B”; He’d turned the past explosive and destructive eruptions to be turned into good in the end, as a safe haven now for these struggling early Christians.

These folks weren’t the only ones that inhabited them throughout history, but they added significantly to its architecture and growth, and left their mark within the caves that would be discovered may years later.

Every now and then a woman would come in to check on the cooking stew and give it a stir. It wouldn’t be a thick or particularly tasty one, but they were thankful for any food at all. Much of what was in the supper that night had been handpicked from the bush; edible greens and roots that those dwellers knew to be good for human consumption.



Photos of Cappadocia
By C.P.V. Gorder

Thaddeus was waiting for the right moment, when others weren't there just yet, to let Eric in on what he felt nearly bursting with joy to tell. At last he told Eric of the news that had just been told him that day by a very trusted source. He was sure this announcement would be very welcome to all the hounded and persecuted Christians.

“Word has it, that the Emperor Constantine has agreed with other rulers as well and declared that everyone is free to worship whatever god they wish to—Christians are thus free to worship the One true God and to openly show their belief in Jesus Christ! This is overwhelming, wonderful news!” Thaddeus whispered with enthusiasm.

“Wow!” Eric replied. “So as soon as it spreads down the ranks to all in the Empire, it will be like a dream become reality! You will be free to worship and serve the Lord as you wish—above ground if you desire!”

“It's more than a dream!” Thaddeus said, “It's truly an answer to our earnest and daily prayers. Tonight is a memorable night when we will remember the gift of God's Son to the World, and when we offer praise for the gift of living our faith freely—at least until things change yet again.”

Eric knew then that according to the modern accounting of days, he was visiting somewhere around the years 313-314 AD, as that is when the “Edict of Milan” was agreed upon by Emperor Constantine who was ruling the West, and Licinius who ruled the East.

“Apparently, Constantine had experienced some visions or revelations that the cross of Christ, that represented the

Christian faith, and that it was to be respected and would bring victory and peace in his empire.

Eric smiled and was very glad for the relief it would bring to these hearty ones, who were true believers in every sense of the word. There wasn't margin for the half-hearted, or those who would be merely Christians in name only. The personal costs were too high. You had to really, really be convinced that Jesus Christ was the truth, and believe with it with all your heart, otherwise you'd give in to the opposing pressure.

Sadly, though, Eric knew that would change with time. When it's the fashionable thing, easy thing, and even the financially beneficial thing to say one is a believer in Christ, that is when corruption of the body of true Christians can occur.

However, for now Eric could congratulate them for the wonderful victory. He could imagine how pleasant it would be for this man to see his grandchildren able to celebrate the birth of Jesus—in happy homes above ground—on the day declared by Pope Julius I to be set aside for it:

December 25th, and “Christ Mass” or “Christmas” began to be celebrated on this date starting in the years between 330-340.

Thaddeus had predictably said, “...until things change again.” The Christians of Turkey would endure much persecution in future times, and at the risk of their lives would they dare to tell others the good news of Jesus to interested people, distribute Bibles—and yes, even bravely attempt to celebrate Christmas, such as Eric had heard that

courageous Necati aydin, Ugur Yüksel, and Tilman Geske had done.

Future times would not be easy, but it's a funny thing that looking back at the history of the followers of Jesus down through the ages shows us that suppression of the Christian faith, rather than abolishing it, in fact aided its growth. People were tired of the silliness of the world, and heartbroken by the acts of the tyrants; they wanted something amazing and real, something that rang true in their hearts, something that quenched their thirst for genuine love and gave them the peace and assurance they longed for. Jesus Christ did all that for those who had found the truth, the way, and the life.

As Eric mused on these things, people were beginning to file into the small room, softly singing a hymn. It somehow helped to lighten the atmosphere and cheer their weary hearts. Thaddeus sat now with a smile on his face. He was brimming with joy to tell them the good news. He knew the hope and relief it would bring to each one of them.

Thaddeus' children came in and greeted him. He asked them about their day. They rarely got to go outside for fear they wouldn't make it back in again, but they had a good tutor who was helping them to learn to read the Holy Scriptures. This was the light that would lighten their darkness. This light would shine in their hearts as a lamp, leading them in the ways of the Lord, through all the deep and dark times—such as living now as a civilized colony of what modern people might call troglodytes; “living in caves and dens of the earth” as a passage of book of Hebrews spoke of.

Once everyone had sung a hymn and offered a prayer and praise to God, the simple stew was served out. Some took the first turn eating with the few bowls that they had and then refilled and passed them to others. New believers had joined them, and more dishes would need to be made. There was always lots to do to carve out their dwelling place and make it as comfortable as they could, meeting the needs of each one was best as they could.

“I have great news to share with you all,” Thaddeus began. Everyone’s attention was on what he was about to say.

“The Emperor Constantine (the emperor of the West) and Licinius (the emperor of the East) have declared that it is now lawful and legal to freely be a Christian—freedom of faith for all religions is the new law of the land!”

Hearing that news took them by surprise. Some acted elated, others disbelieved that it really was possible or that it actually had happened; some voiced questions, and others expressed that extreme caution be still observed until they were absolutely sure this was a fact—and all governors and law enforcers were well informed and aware.

The persecution of Christians had been indeed fierce, why even the brave Georgios, who was well respected by the former emperor Diocletian, was persecuted for his faith in Christ. He was like the scripture, “loved not his life unto the death.”

The story of this man was passed on to these ones here now surviving by staying in an underground and widely unknown civilization.

Stories were told of how bravely this man, who was known much later on as “St. George” had stood against a dragon that was harming many, and won. Eric knew that this is how he is depicted all around the world—as he is even revered by those of different faiths and in many countries. Some say this tale of a dragon was a myth, others say the iconic illustration of this man was simply a symbolism of victory over evil. But, regardless of whether this story is an actual account, Georgios was a real man that lived, and a strong, fearless man—and his inner strength and protection on him was due to his belief in the true God.

However, there came a time when he would face something more fearsome than a terrible beast. When Emperor Diocletian issued the edict stating that none of the men on his team were to be Christian, and in fact had to openly declare their belief in the false Roman religion, Georgios was faced with the decision.

It seemed harder than the challenge of facing a dragon. To be a hero makes one receive glory and great acclaim. Yet, this time, if he faced down and went against the hurtful and destructive Emperor’s rules, his only reward and recognition would be in Heaven. No one would cheer for him on Earth, for it would be far too dangerous. However, he made the right choice—in God’s eyes, as He was ever watching over Georgios. He refused to worship or fear any other but the true God, and believed in His Son Jesus. That was one of his last decisions he made in the year 303 AD, as because of it, he soon was ushered into his glorious reward for staying true to the faith.

And the story is told that his standing up to the Emperor gave many others courage to stay true to their faith and defy the imposed “religion of the state” that was being enforced.

Eric recalled that “St. George’s day” is remembered on April 23. To him it was just yet another date to remember events in history. However, somehow speaking with the people who lived now in Georgios Christian father’s home country, and seeing the impact that the life of one dedicated to Christ had on them, gave the day more meaning.

In the future, it would serve to be a day to remember that a Christian isn’t a true Christian unless they are willing to give everything they have for the One who gave His all for them; it would be a day to give his all—heart, mind and devotion, for yet another year. It would be a date he could renew his determination to banish and cast out every slithering, flying, creeping, intimidating, monstrous dragon of sin and evil in his life that threatened to weaken his faith and conviction to stand up for the truth at all costs.

Eric had seen so many depictions of this iconic saintly figure. Though the picture was always rather similar, there was one thing that took a variety of appearances, depending on what part of the world the painting or picture or statue or tapestry or metal work was artistically created in.

Since the story of “St. George and the dragon” was passed on primarily by word of mouth, those who heard the story and created a work of art from it would have drawn a creature that was known to them in that part of the world.



Statue of George and the Dragon—in the Ukraine
By C.P.V. Gorder

This revealed some interesting things to Eric: Dragons were a reality and danger the world over; everyone in times past were well aware of them and knew what they were; and that there were many species or types of them.

Some were depicted and described in ancient manuscripts as resembling some types of what we call dinosaurs today; while others looked more like huge serpents with leathery wings and sharp claws. Obviously, with someone held up as a hero like St. George combined with the real dangers these olden-day beasts caused, it really should be no surprise that few if any of these large and aggressive reptilian creatures are still around today.

It seemed to Eric something of a parable as well, as the world over down throughout time the opposition to those of the Christian faith would take on many faces—as it is with the varied depictions of the dragons, yet all with the intent of destroying the truth and knowledge of Jesus. However, with Jesus our deliver and Hero, who in the Book of Revelations was seen in a vision to be sitting on a white horse, will win the victory over the dragon (a name for His foe, Satan, written about in the Book of Revelations as well).

Jesus will conquer all opposition, in His time and in His way, and we will one day all be truly free to love and worship Him as He reigns sovereign in the Kingdom of Heaven—God’s Kingdom.

The story of Georgios’ greatest victory—that of remaining true to Christ when Emperors and even Satan himself tried to stop the believers of Jesus Christ, seemed to give these hiding Christians much courage. But the story also warned of the need for caution at this point in time.

Perhaps some of the stories told about this Georgios had been embellished or added to over time and Eric couldn't really verify each detail told about this man —the stories of all kinds of supernatural happenings to do with him. However, somehow the stories and accounts passed on to these ones here were building courage in their hearts and seemed right for this time.

Thaddeus said, "I know the news of this latest edict brings mixed feelings within your hearts—a joy you want to freely express; joy for our God's intervention to ease our plight, yet the feeling is also followed by the fear of what will happen if all caution is dismissed. Let us pray and commit our hearts and ourselves to God. He has done a great work, and Glory be to His name forever. He is ever merciful."

After prayer Eric chatted with some of the believers, and thought of a few things to do to entertain the children and make them laugh. Then when Thaddeus had a moment, Eric asked him a bit more about what was known of St. George. From his discussion he found out, that as far as the story was passed on that his father was a native of that very place: Cappadocia, and he was raised there for some time. His mother owned farmland in Palestine, so Georgios also lived there for a time.

Eric had seen pictures of Palestine before, and closed his eyes for a moment to think of some beautiful Palestinian scenery, to give a short relief from the stone walls, dim lighting, chilling air and close quarters. But he was to do more than just imagine.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Dozing by the chill-breaking open fire, Eric rubbed his eyes. Startling shouts and energy-charged voices were rousing the team of companions he had just found himself among. The starry sky was their only roof on this cloudless night; the grass their resting place. But tonight was different. Sleep seemed far from the eyes of this rugged, hearty band.

Danger they knew at times, and thus they must be ever watchful. The town's folks depended on them to keep the flocks they watched over good and safe. Sheep meant livelihood for many. But the shouts of wonder and thrill were not telling of danger. Neither were the shepherds' voices tinged with fear as they had been moments previously when they experienced a most extraordinary occurrence.

Replacing initial shock now was a spirit of joy mixed with the passion of a mission, and the deep feeling of honour that God's presence had unmistakably come into their midst and touched them all. This stirred them to heart of their very soul.

There was no hint of drowsiness now. With pure and unhindered energy with light feet, off they wisped to carry out a commission they could not resist or be detained from.

"Come! Let us see this thing which the Lord has made known to us!" the leader said, and all joined in agreement.

Eric, who then found himself running with this group of shepherds managed to find out just where they were going and what they were doing, from the things he overheard the men saying.

“Bethlehem...so that is where I am? And by the looks of their clothes this must be sometime in the distant past. Look at the houses and the quaint, yet old ways of living,” he thought when nearing the small village.

“Whatever got these shepherds going to town in a hurry, and at this time of the night, must have been rather alluring. What could be so compelling?”

But Eric didn't have long to wonder, for when he was invited along with this enthusiastic team into a very humble dwelling place, he then heard the full story.

One shepherd started out explaining their presence to a couple who were doting over a newborn baby.

“We were watching over our flocks tonight, when all of a sudden the darkness fled while a brilliance filled the sky! All around us was bathed in a heavenly light.”

“Yes,” continued a younger man, “It was the angel of the Lord! And we were terrified! That is until...”

Another man interrupted, too excited to hold back,

“The Angel told us that this very night, the long awaited Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer of all mankind, was born on Earth. And not only that, but that he was to be found right here in Bethlehem. We were shocked!”

An older shepherd explained,

“The angel gave us specific descriptions and instructions of where this special child was to be found—the babe would be, of all unusual places, sleeping in a manger in a stable!”

The younger of the shepherds burst enthusiastically into the conversation. “That’s when we saw the most spectacular of all displays, which none of us will ever, ever forget!”

Waiting in eager anticipation for the rest of the story, the man, Joseph, and his wife Mary, listened and looked on intently.

The teenager continued,

“Then the whole sky was filled with more angels than I could even count! Heartily and with beautiful, angelic voices they sang out the wonderful news, that God’s Son was here among us. ‘Glory to God in the Highest’ their powerful yet melodic voices sang out for us all to hear.”

The shepherds then smiled, gazing at the resting baby, saying in their own way, “We are here to worship the baby, the King of kings, the Saviour of us all.”

With that they all broke out in praise and song, as they knelt down before this baby.

The parents of the child were notably amazed that God would announce the event of their child in such a spectacular way. They knew, more assuredly than before, that this child was a very special one.



Art by Fleur Celeste

However, the announcing part wasn't over yet. In fact, that glorious event on the hillside of Bethlehem was just the starting point. God wasn't planning on sending brilliant angels around, appearing to everyone to tell them the marvellous news—it would be just plain freaky to the poor town dwellers. Instead, this humble class of workers, the shepherds, felt the commission to do so, and joyfully determined to carry it out.

Eric could hardly believe where he was. It began to sink in. He was now at the scene of one of the most important and memorable events in all of world history. This is the event that would eventually bring redemption to all humankind: freedom from the curse the world was under, and life eternal would replace the punishment of death.

Eric, too, then knelt down with the shepherds. A tear ran down his cheek. He knew history enough to know what eventually would happen to this beautiful innocent child when he grew to be a man. All Eric could whisper was “Thank You” as he gazed at the face of the infant who was now looking at him.

After a few moments of silence and wonder, Eric felt the tug of one of the shepherd boys, “Come on! We've got to tell everyone—the whole world MUST know! God's told us so that we could tell everyone around. Let's go!”

Before he knew it, Eric was going from house-to-house to anyone who was still awake, hearing and seeing these zest-filled shepherds passing on the amazing announcement.

He knew they would continue on doing so the next day as well. “Everyone must know!” the shepherds were saying.

They would only return to their quiet post on the hillside when they were sure they'd spread the good news all around.

Eric felt his head spinning at all he had just heard and witnessed. Breaking away from the band of shepherds who determinedly would continue with their news-spreading mission, he paused beside a house, and sat on the step.

Eric looked up at the stars and saw a slight blanket of clouds blowing across the sky. He could only imagine what the grand angelic choir must have looked and heard like. Eric wrapped his cloak tightly around himself for warmth, leaned against the doorpost and closed his eyes.

Thinking only two minutes had passed he was stunned to find things looking somewhat different when he opened his eyes again. It was now late afternoon, and people were milling around, some carrying water or supplies for their family's meal.

"I wonder how much time has gone by? —Though by the looks of it, I still seem to be in Bethlehem."

Eric, feeling hungry decided to walk around and see what he could find. As he did, he mused on the little Babe that he just had the privilege of meeting.

"Perhaps I could walk towards that humble stable and see how they are getting on," Eric thought to himself.

But when he arrived, he rubbed his eyes. Was he seeing things right? The Baby, the parents, their belongings, everything was gone! A donkey was drowsily standing in a stall, but there was no sign of this special family—that to him had been there only moments previously.

“Strange. Maybe I got the place wrong. I wonder where they could be?” Eric was puzzled.

Just then a friendly young man came up to him, carrying young lamb over his shoulders. Eric recognized his face. It was one of the shepherds he had been among.

“I come often too,” he said to Eric, “just to remember that glorious night when God’s Son rested in His first earthly bed—one but padded with straw. It’s been two years now, but I well remember it just like it was yesterday.”

“Where is he now? I mean where are they all?” Eric inquired.

“Oh, thank heaven, when most of the travellers left after being counted and paying their taxes, a proper dwelling place was then available, not too far from here. I see them from time to time. The boy’s walking and talking now, and is the joy of his parents heart,” the shepherd explained.

Two years have past? Eric was surprised. Then it dawned on him. He knew history enough to know what happened next, and thought, *“Maybe, just maybe I’ll get to see those famous royal visitors. Wouldn’t that be great!”*

Eric bid the young shepherd goodbye and continued on his way, hoping to find something to eat. A young lady and her brother were leading a mule down the road, carrying a load of corn. Eric nodded and smiled at them. Then noticing he was a stranger there, they offered Eric an ear of corn, as a show of kindness.

“You are welcome here,” the brother said.

Gratefully Eric accepted it and thanked them profusely.

But that was not all.

The man then poured out some water from their jug that was also strapped onto the mule and offered the drink to Eric. Again he was touched with the kindness shown to him, a perfect stranger.

“Friendly folks they are,” Eric thought, and as a token of kindness in return handed them the small leather pouch that he was wearing. It was empty, but he knew they could put it to use.

“Besides, “ he realised, “The way this trip has gone thus far, I don’t thinking I’ll need it for much longer. I feel my trip is nearly at a close.”

After profusely refusing to accept the gift from Eric, as is part of their customs and manners, Eric insisted that they keep it. Finally they did, and thanked Eric heartily before continuing on their way.

“I quite like these humble and generous folks. I think I could get used to living among them. This part of the world may not be as it should be, in the modern times that I live in; but the humble people, I hear, are just as kind at heart when allowed to flourish and live peacefully in their dwelling places, like they did many years ago. How I wish ‘Peace on Earth and good will’ came to all.

A tear ran down his face as he took in the scene around. He knew what the generations that followed would endure and his heart began to ache. But a ray of cheer came as he remembered the words and hummed the tune of a marvellous song he heard at a Christmas concert just days before he boarded the train.

Christmas In Bethlehem

Verse 1

Winter fires were burning bright,
Travellers journeyed in the night.
A husband led his weary wife through the falling snow
To a humble cattle stall,
Nowhere else to go.
Christmas in Bethlehem, many years ago.

Verse 2

There was born a baby boy,
Mother's heart was filled with joy,
Shepherds heard the angel voices fill the night with song,
Wise men wondered at a star,
With strange celestial glow.
Christmas in Bethlehem, many years ago.

Verse 3

And in Bethlehem today
Children fear, yet still they play
While mothers cry and fathers pray for peace to come again.
And around the weary world echoes the refrain:
"Christmas in Bethlehem, when shall true love reign?"

Verse 4

One day soon the Prince of Love
Will return from skies above
And His power shall overcome all pain and tears and war.
Then shall songs of joy and praise
Ring out from shore to shore.
Christmas in Bethlehem, peace on Earth once more.

(Music and Lyrics: Michael Dooley.)

“Let me enjoy the moment in this peaceful village, for now,” Eric resolved.

The sun was setting lower in the sky, but it wasn't long before he then heard a great commotion. He looked in the not-too-far-distance to see what appeared to be a large train of camels with riders, drivers, and loaded with abundant supplies for their journey. Some women of the village were urged to quickly draw water and to prepare, as some very important visitors were soon to be arriving.

The well-clothed and majestic visitors approached, and the people of the village that stood watching it all, gave humble respectful bows. Ladies brought dried fruits and water, young men helped to lead the traveller's animals to the water-filled troughs. Out of politeness the important men accepted the generous offers, but their sights were steadily forward on one certain house.

“Look!! Look!!” cried one young man who pointed enthusiastically over the house where Mary and Joseph and little boy Jesus were now living.

“What is that?” everyone wondered.

The kings smiled and said, “That is the light that has led us on our journey—our journey to meet the young new king.”

Without hesitating any longer, they pulled out what seemed to be very precious treasures. With these they proceeded to walk to the house that had shining over it a marvellous star or light from God, marking the place they were to go.

A greatly surprised Mary stood at the door with a young child in her arms—young boy Jesus. Joseph, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, invited these special visitors into their humble dwelling place.

Eric thought, *“Imagine the shock they would have gotten if they’d showed up a couple years ago, when this family was still in the stable! Though their abode now is common and not fancy in the least, at least it seems somewhat more fitting to have kings as guests enter where they now live.”*

But the distinguished visitors were not looking for a place to be treated royally, indeed it would not have made any difference to them if they had arrived to see Baby Jesus in a manger. They would have been just as honoured. Instead of seeking acclaim and respect, these ones were here to worship the One sent from God to the World, His very own Son.

Eric was determined to see each detail of this famous historical event that has been remembered for thousands of years since. He crept around until he found a window that he could look in, without being noticed.

He watched as these kings of the East humbly knelt down to pay their respects to the greatest King of all. Gifts were given, as was the custom when honouring a king. They laid at the young child’s feet the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

It was a solemn and deeply moving moment. One that neither Mary nor Joseph would ever forget. It had taken so very long for these special ones to reach their destination, but the tiresome journey had at last been worth it.

In quietness they left, feeling the wonder of the moment, and found lodgings and supper for the night.

In his dream Eric thought to do the same, but was suddenly nudged awake by a fellow traveller, and none too soon. His train to Dublin had reached its destination.

While quickly gathering up his bags and items he pondered the trip he'd just taken. However, he decided to put off the serious thinking until later, as he couldn't let himself get distracted at this crucial time when he just might leave something important behind. Right now he must focus.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Off the train and into the cold Eric went. It was Christmas time and somehow this year he felt the wonder of it especially strong. As the wind greeted him he breathed in deeply. He'd made it at last. He was now living in real time, in the present, though memories lingered from all that he'd just experienced.

"Just dreams," Eric told himself and hoped the chill would shake him out of the daze he still felt somewhat in.

Yet, as diligent as he thought he'd been to collect all his belongings when exiting the train, due to the fact that his mind was still awlirl, he didn't notice his wallet holding his ID card fall from his partly zipped bag. Thankfully, an honest fellow traveller picked it up as they walked through to exit a moment later, and determined to find its owner.

Eric felt nearly dizzy as the electric atmosphere of the city hit him. He thought,

"It seems the energy coming from the hundreds of people rushing about could almost power the Christmas lights! I sense some people are enjoying the rush of the moment, but others, not so much. I don't have much to buy, so I don't feel any real pressure."

Then he thought, "But even though there's a great atmosphere, every now and then he'd catch a glimpse of some very unfortunate homeless person reaching out, I believe, not so much for money, but for acknowledgement, recognition and a little compassion. Something the world is lacking in at the moment.

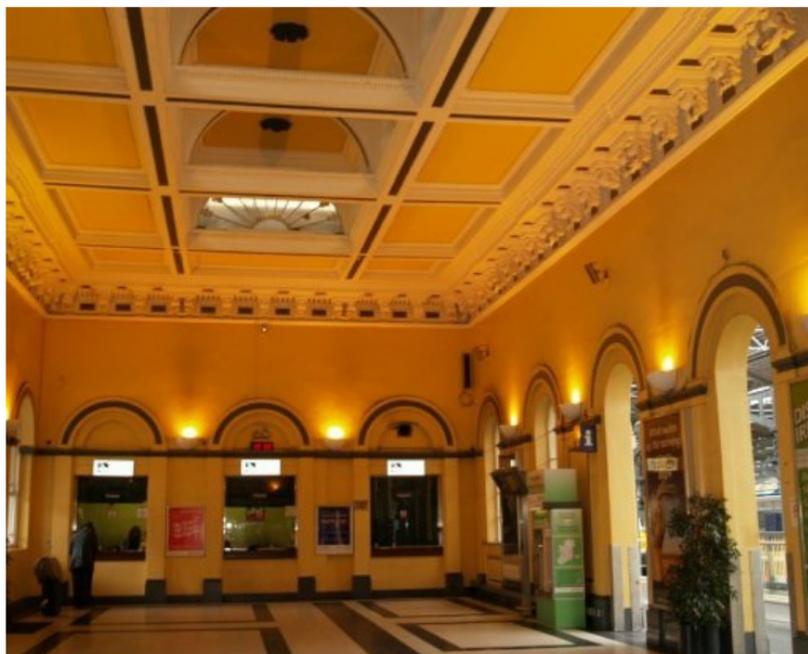
It's at moments like this that one could feel more than a little ashamed for getting excited about Christmas festivities and gifts, when all over the world there are people who are excited about just making it through another day, no matter how awful their circumstances.

Eric looks over to see a poster on a wall, in an attempt to steer people's thoughts to the true values of life: and living in loving, caring ways. Framed in an artistic wreath of holly, it said:

"If Jesus were here right now what would He do and, my goodness, what would He think? We may have heard His words but did we really, I mean really, LISTEN? Perhaps we've done enough shopping, and it's time to start giving."

Eric pondered and thought, "Yes. I have all I need here in my soul. I don't need more *things* to enable me to give out from my heart and be a friend. I don't need to carry an armload of store-bought things to really enjoy Christmas; just a smile, some good cheer, a listening ear, a willing helping hand, and perhaps some time and change to spare for those in need."

As he made his way to meet his Uncle and Aunt, he imagined his visit. He was going now to spend time with loved ones. He was sure they would laugh, sing and share happy dreams, thoughts and memories; laughing as they planned their resolutions for the New Year. He was glad to know and love those whom he considered to be some of the loveliest and kindest people. It would be amid such friendly company, with the shops and sparkle of the town long forgotten, that he could say heartily, "Yes! Now it's really Christmas."



Dublin station



Dublin at Christmas

Charley, who found Eric's lost wallet, quickly phoned the cell phone number he found in it, but Eric's phone didn't respond. The battery was in need of being charged.

"Great, there's a home number as well," Charley said, and made the call to the house of his Uncle, with whom he presently lived.

"Hello," Uncle Ned picked up.

"Oh, hi, are you Eric? I found a wallet..." Charley began to explain.

"I'm his Uncle," Ned explained, but then told Charley the address of the place Eric was going to be staying at over the holidays.

Charley thanked Uncle Ned, and read over the scrap of paper he'd written the address on. It wasn't far from where he lived anyway, so he took the time to go on over. However, to his disappointment, there was no one home. He was cold and wanted to get on home himself.

He spotted the light on in the nearby cottage and thought to see if they would be willing to help out. If they could hold on to the wallet until Eric arrived there, they could give it to Eric.

"Jinga-linga-ding" the doorbell festively sounded, and soon Charley was welcomed into the little cottage.

"Hello, Ma'am, and Merry Christmas to you," Charley said before making his request.

The elderly lady sitting by the fire heard him out and promised to pass the wallet on. She would ring her neighbour shortly and arrange for Eric to come over and pick it up. Though the neighbours had moved there just recently, she had learned enough about them to know they had a nephew called Eric, and were having him there over the holidays.

“What’s his family name, dear?” the elderly lady asked Charley, since reading small text was something her dimming sight didn’t allow these days.

Charley read all that was on the photo ID card, then handed the wallet to the lady, and wished her a Happy Christmas once again.

“Please, won’t you help yourself to something from the kitchen before you go?” the grandmotherly woman offered. Charley gratefully accepted. He then kept this lonely woman company for some moments while he sipped on some camomile tea.

“Did you grow these flowers yourself?” Charley asked.

“Ah, yes, indeed. When the season is right I do my part to grow what little I can manage. But the things that last on through the winter are what I enjoy giving space to in my garden ,” the lady responded.

Charley looked around at the decorated fireplace and glanced at the few Christmas cards on display with simple greetings and well-wishes. Most seemed to be addressed to a certain, “Heather”.

Though the lady, who responded her name was indeed Heather, tried to make small talk with Charley, her mind was dreaming of sometime in the past. The name that Charley had read to her off the ID card had opened up her memories. She had heard that name before.

Charley then excused himself to make his way home, leaving Heather to her thoughts. She then glanced briefly at the ID card and saw the photo of the young man to whom it belonged. It was hard to believe what her eyes were telling her.

However, her thoughts were soon interrupted, and joyously so.

“Jingle-linga-ding,” sounded the bells on the house door as two shivering ladies entered the small cottage.

Sarah walked in to find her grandmother, smiling beside the fireplace. She was glad that a good neighbour looked after her, ensuring she had plenty of firewood. He was always treated to a good cup of tea and a story or two, when he did. Grandmother made good company, though it was infrequent when she had the pleasure of a visit.

This Christmas would be different. Sarah had come, and brought along a new guest as well. Sarah introduced Melinda to her grandmother, and before long they were caught up in the world of stories—what life was like when Grandma was young. Maybe that is where Sarah had inherited the gift of writing and a love of stories.

After awhile Grandma pulled out her old, worn and faithful Bible. Though she could no longer read it for herself, she remembered well what it said. And when visitors would

come, she would implore them to read a section here or there to her.

“It’s Christmas time, Sarah dear, would you kindly do me the favour of reading to me the story of the first Christmas? You’ll see I’ve had it marked with bookmarks,” Grandmother asked tenderly.

Sarah took the Bible and moved in closer to the lamp, while Melinda sat back and rocked gently in the rocking chair and listened as selections of the Christmas story was read from the Books of Luke and Matthew.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.

And the angel departed from her.

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 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.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

(Luke 1:26-49; Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-11)

After savouring the story of the birth of the Saviour, a warm stew was enjoyed by the ladies, and cheers made to welcome yet another Christmas time.

“Go ahead, now dears,” Grandmother cheerily dismissed the ladies, “I know you have things to do, books to write and mysteries to solve. I’ll see you later.”

With this the ladies were off to the spare room they would share over the holidays. They had much to discuss. While on the train ride here, Sarah had confided to Melinda that she had more than just a suspicion that the one she loved long ago, might have had more than one time of weaving in and out of people’s lives—perhaps throughout even distant history.

It seemed ridiculous of course, but it was worth the exploration. If nothing else, it made the Christmas holidays that much more interesting.

Now, in the privacy of the room in a quiet neighbourhood Sarah showed Melinda her notes and discoveries thus far of the events surrounding who she called, “Mysterious Mr. Macgilpatrick.”

“You mean to tell me you are confident that he’s been seen by others, in times past? Well, I don’t actually believe it, of course, but for the sake of a bit of fun, I’d enjoy hearing of your discoveries and findings.” Melinda encouraged Sarah to go on.

Old notes and letters dug up from libraries, stories passed down from one generation to the next, and on the clues seemed to egg her on; and as if it were a treasure hunt, Sarah kept on her search. Since she was a writer, Sarah wanted to bring these thoughts, ideas, legends and stories into a blend to form an interesting book. True or not, she couldn’t really make out. Yet, here sat before her what could be the only living witness she found—someone who had actually met Mysterious Mr. Macgilpatrick. Sarah only had sketchy information to go on before, but maybe something could be built on and written.

While the young ladies were in the next room, Grandmother Heather, with ever growing curiosity phoned her neighbours to tell them that she had something for their nephew. Eric was now there and was very relieved when he spoke on the phone to Grandmother Heather and found out that his lost wallet—that he was still unaware was lost—had been found. Though her voice sounded older, it seemed to trigger a memory. He’d heard it before... in his dream while on the train! What he had tried to push off as a dream seemed to be catching up with him. And his voice gave her heart a slight jump. It paired well with the name Charley had told her.

“I’ll be over there right away,” Eric said, and grabbed his coat.

An unexpected door “jingle-linga-ding,” sounded—unexpected to the young ladies, that is. Perhaps the kind neighbour had shown up to see how Grandmother was getting on, or it was someone bringing Christmas wishes? However, when Sarah heard only low speaking, she peered around the corner to see who had come to grace their humble abode.

“It’s been a while, Eric Macgilpatrick, a long while since we met last,” Grandmother said in almost a whisper, certain of who this young man was, now that she saw his face again.

“Indeed it has, Heather,” responded the handsome gentleman. “Yet it seems to me like it was only hours,” he said with a wink and curious smile. “Though I thought it was but a dream.”

Sarah pulled back. Something caught her breath. She was too stunned for words. “Maybe the book will be completed after all,” she thought to herself.

“Sarah,” called out her Grandmother, “Can you please help me for a moment? I need a cup of tea poured.”

Pulling herself together she put on a serene smile and entered the room, but not before whispering to Melinda, “Prepare, just in case you need to make an appearance to a guest.”

“Pleased to meet you! You must be Sarah,” the young gentleman said as Sarah walked over and shook his hand.

“The pleasure is mine as well,” Sarah said, hardly controlling the words that ran out her ruby lips that seemed to match her crimson hair.

As Sarah served the guest, Grandmother eased the silence by saying, “She’s a good writer, this granddaughter of mine. Indeed she’s here to work on her latest book. Isn’t that right dear?”

Blushing slightly, not knowing just where to take this conversation from here, she simply nodded yes.

Grandmother then touched Sarah’s hand and whispered to her to call Melinda to join them, and calmly Sarah then proceeded to do just that. Calm in exterior demeanour, but racing or rather bursting on the inside.

There could be a million ways she could say it, but chose to simply say, “Melinda, there’s a Christmas present for you, that’s just come.”

Sarah could hardly contain her anticipation as the moment seemed too good to be true.

Indeed, watching the surprised, then joyous looks on the faces of these two who at last had been reunited, was a gift in itself. And she had no intention of letting Eric Macgilpatrick leave until the full story had been told, and could be written down for generations to come.

It was a magical, mysterious and marvellous Christmas time.

Since Eric was staying just next door he joined the ladies each day for meals, and for very long chats and story-telling. Everyone, Heather included, got to learn of his family life

and all the adventures he had been on, in some mysterious way. When Heather heard that Frances R. Havergal held a closeness to their heart, she made a mental note of it.

One night after supper, before Eric left to go to his quarters in his Aunt's house, Heather called him over and gave him a package, "Here is a Christmas gift for you and your sister. I've had this book for many years, but since I can no longer see well enough to read, I want you both to have it."

Eric looked to see that it was a book called, "Kept for the Master's Use—By Frances Ridley Havergal". His face lit up. Now he had just the thing for Elizabeth. She loved to read, and he knew she'd find comfort in the thoughts shared in this book. Eric thanked Heather enthusiastically.

"Thank you so much. I can't think of something better. This will be perfect for Elizabeth!"

Eric bid everyone good night, and the ladies retired as well. However, when nearly asleep Sarah suddenly remembered something and bolted up in bed.

"What on Earth did Grandmother mean when she said to Eric, 'It's been a long time'? Do I really have under this humble roof not just one, but two eye-witnesses to the journey through time of our mysterious Mr. Macgilpatrick?" Somehow both Eric and Grandmother Heather hadn't chosen mentioned their rendezvous in the '60's, while Eric sat to chat with them over these days.

However, Sarah would have to wait until morning, and after a long time pondering, at last fell asleep.

When she awoke, however, she found Melinda's bed empty—and curiously so, almost as if she had never been there to begin with. Yet she let out a sigh of relief when she saw that Grandmother was sitting, as always, beside the fireplace; praying no doubt for loved ones near and far.

Glad actually, for the time alone with her, Sarah posed the question, “When did you meet Mr. Macgilpatrick, for the first time?”

Grandmother smiled and winked, glad for a chance to tell a good story. It seemed the time was right.

“It was the year 1968, and I was still living in my native country—America. That was the year when Apollo 8 and its team travelling inside, spent Christmas in space.” Grandmother's story began unfolding.

It took about half an hour until the story was completed, and Sarah was thrilled with this recent evidence and valuable information.

Discerning Sarah's thoughts about Melinda, Grandmother ended their chat by saying, “Don't worry. Melinda—and Eric—will be back, when they are ready.”

And sure enough, the two of them walked in only a short while later, with smiles on their faces and trays of baked delights and fruit, for a delicious breakfast to all share.

Where had she been? Had she, too, been taken back in time, this time to share the memories and events that she had missed with Eric, while he journeyed and she waited? Perhaps. And if so, Sarah was glad they chose to come back to this time and place.

And as they shared a feast for breakfast, there were other joys to discuss. It seemed that the bells that would ring in the next Christmas and New Year, would serve as wedding bells as well.

What a wonderful—memorable—Christmas holiday it had been.

Sarah packed up her few belongings and prepared to leave that day for home. Eric and Melinda had left already the day before. Now it was just her and Grandmother left for the farewells.

“Merry Christmas, Sarah, and fare thee well, until you come again,” said Grandmother, placing a wrapped rectangular shaped gift into her granddaughter’s hands.

“It has been so nice to have you here—and your friends too. May the good Lord keep you all in this coming year.”

Knowing Sarah’s love for writing and books, her grandmother had saved her a new, special book. When she’d heard the neighbours talk of it, she’d requested their assistance to secure a copy as well. For months Grandmother had saved it, to be given during Sarah’s Christmas visit.

Sarah opened the wrapping and saw the cover, “Angelic Encounters—True stories”. It sparked her interest, as she mused, “This would certainly make the train ride home more enjoyable.”

“It looks lovely! Thank you!” Sarah expressed, giving her grandmother a hug.

“Suppose you’d like to read one of the stories to me, Darling, before you go? I’ve some fresh bread and jam, and milk we can warm. It will be our own special Christmas time, just you and me.”

Sarah glanced at the story titles of the book, and the word “Christmas” in some titles caught her eye. She decided one of those would be right for the occasion.

Sarah placed her bags at the front door, and set up the table for their simple meal.

Grandmother warmed the milk, sliced the bread, and placed another log on the fire.

When they were settled at the table, Grandmother held her granddaughter’s hand and gave it a squeeze. Sarah could tell her eyes were sparkling with a tear or two. She would miss Sarah.

Bravely Grandmother led in a prayer of thanksgiving for all that they did have, even though times of cold and lonesomeness may lay ahead, perhaps for the both of them. The new year that they were soon to face brought an element of uncertainty, yet a whisper of hope.

“Who knows what will happen this year?” Sarah said in a cheery voice. “I’m sure God’s got something great in mind for the both of us.”

Grandmother nodded.

As Sarah began to read the first Christmas-themed story in the new book, they soon realised something else that they had to be grateful for.



Photo of a Church in Romania
By C.P.V. Gorder

The true story told of the first Christmas that the people of Romania were finally allowed to celebrate, a year after the fall of Communism. During that year, the teenagers of this family were at last permitted to enter a church and to voice questions they'd always wondered—about God, about angels, about life beyond this temporal existence, about Christ, and the meaning of Christmas. To their delight they found answers, discovered truths, revelled in joy of heart as they accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and relished the freedom to read a Bible.

As Sarah read on, she looked up at her own dear Grandmother, saying, "I'm glad you are the way you are. You haven't been hurt and soured like their grandma, who was denied the chance to explore God's existence and forbidden to enjoy celebrating Christmas together with her children and grandchildren. Poor family."

Sarah continued reading this story that told of a mysterious happening.

The teenage sisters wished for a Christmas tree that year, but finances were too tight, and the fear that had gripped each of the older adults still lingered. Yet, one day, a week before Christmas, as the older sister was out, a stranger walked up to her carrying a Christmas tree. He gave it to the young lady for free, and after wishing her a "Merry Christmas", walked away.

They never saw him before or since. The ladies believed him to be an angel, or messenger from God. And, because it was given for free, their father allowed them to set it up in their home.

The sisters were delighted, as for the first time their whole family could begin to let the joy of the Christmas season into their homes and hearts.



After the story concluded, Grandmother and Sarah pondered on the thought of how wonderful it was to have the liberty to enjoy celebrating Christmas each year. It hasn't always been the case, the world over, and may not be, sometime in the future. But for now they could.

With a sudden inspiration, they playfully lifted their milk mugs and clinked them for a toast, "To Freedom" "To Christmas" they chimed together simultaneously. They had renewed appreciation to savour the season; the Saviour and the reason.

Epilogue

Close to a year later, Sarah sat putting the finishing touches on her book that she'd titled "The Christmas Train Ride". It would be ready to print in time for Christmas. She smiled and was pleased at all that had come together to make it possible.

She stood up to stretch, and walked outside to check the letterbox. A letter that had come in!

"Oh, it's from Melinda! I've been invited to her and Eric's wedding! And more..." Sarah realised, and excitement began to tingle.

A portion of the letter from Melinda said:

"After the wedding, we'll be taking time off down in Australia. A warm Christmas sounds great for our honeymoon. Last year, I was invited to spend the Christmas and New Year days off with you, and this year I would like to return the favour and invite you to come stay with me—I mean us—for the year-end and holidays, if you'd like. Come alone if you like, or bring a friend, if you wish. The house we're renting has plenty of room."

That did sound like a wild idea, certainly something far from her mind, but worth a go. Sarah gave her Grandmother a ring before making a decision. Grandmother heartily encouraged her to "flap her wings and migrate for part of the winter" as she put it; and Sarah promised her the first copy of her new book—and would ask Grandmother's kind neighbours to visit her each day over the Christmas season to read it with her.

When Sarah had pondered who, if anyone, to invite along, there was one person she couldn't get out of her mind. In fact, it was the one who was partly responsible for her book getting finished, and Melinda meeting up with the love of her life—and Eric with his. Charley bringing the lost-and-found wallet to Grandmother had been a wonderful piece in the puzzle that made so many things fit together.

Sarah knew Charley somewhat. It was a casual friendship that had been building slowly over a long time. However, until last year it was a rather superficial friendship, since Sarah wasn't in Charley's neighbourhood that often—only when she would visit her grandmother. But since last Christmas, their interest in each other, and friendship, seem to deepen. Keeping in touch online and via phone provided some emotional diversion to start with, and gave the hope of something more developing in the future

“Yes, I think I will ask him. It's worth a go. I'll have nothing to lose. One way or the other I am going to have a great time with friends,” she determined. After a bold phone call to a surprised but pleased Charley, the planned trip was beginning to take shape.

Sarah sat down to answer Melinda's letter, and it was then that she noticed a small note at the back of it that she'd somehow missed. It said:

“P.S. We've got new stories to share, that we've managed to keep a secret! Perhaps you'll wish to write a sequel to the book you are finishing now. But I'll save the details until we can talk face-to-face.

“The only hint I’ll give is that this year’s Easter break and time away that Eric and I took brought some unexpected travel, if you know what I mean...”

Sarah was desperately curious. Her mind started exploring possibilities.

“Perhaps the sequel will be titled, ‘The Easter Train Ride?’” she chuckled, and was glad she didn’t have long to wait until hearing of “The next adventures of the mysterious Mr.—and Mrs?—Macgilpatrick”.



The author, as child, running
through a grassy meadow in
Ireland, when her family's lived
there for a short time.
The vivid memories linger.

**Inspirational.
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**Heart warming for
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A History-filled journey, woven together with a fictitious character—Eric—on a train to Dublin, one Christmas season. He is surprised to find that as his trip progresses forward, he simultaneously travels back in time further with each hour.

In true-to-life ways Eric interacts with historical characters and experiences many interesting, notable, actual Christmas events of years gone by—some that have occurred as far back as 2000 years ago. Many old writings are included therein, as well as illustrations and photos to bring it to life.

