STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

Identical With the Star of Tycho?

THE MATTER WAS DISCOVERED.

Remarkable Changes in Appearance—Suggestions in Regard to It—The Facts Which Astronomers Have Ascertained in this Regard.

(For the Sunday Gazette.)

FORT WORTH, Dec. 23.—One of the most enduring legends connected with the life of the Saviour is that which seeks to identify the blazing star that appeared in the east at Tycho Brahe, the Danish astronomer, with the "star in the East," that led the Magi to the cradle of Christ to Bethlehem.

The circumstances of its appearance and disappearance may be said to have made a dramatic entrance upon the scene and a considerable uncertainty as to the exact date when it became visible, but himself saw it for the first time on the night of the 11th of November, 1572. He was then about 26 years of age and was engaged in the chemistry of that day, and devoted himself chiefly with the discovery of the process of making gold. He was returning home from his chemical laboratory when he saw the star. It was in the constellation of Cassiopeia, nearly in the zenith, and only about 20 degrees from the moon, and occupied by the strange star of Andromeda. It scintillated with dazzling brightness, far outshining Jupiter in the sky, and equaling the brightness of Venus at her brightest, when she is cast a distinct shadow after sunset.

Tycho knew very well that no such star had ever visible there before, seems to have been quite bewildered by the apparition, unable to trust his own eyes, or to believe the evidence of his senses, and acted as if he saw the star. They did. Still, finally, he much confounded to see so bright and brilliant a phenomenon to be in heaven, and his senses, the young men and building astronomer invited the peasants who were driving by and shout attention to the star. Their astonishment was equally startling. Some of them declared that they had never seen any star, with the best access at the moment, it possible, to ascertain the exact distance from the earth. Others, in the opinion of Tycho, strongly affirmed that it was the same star which they had seen before, and that it had disappeared for a time, and then had come back to its place in the sky where it had been before. Indeed, some of the more professed astronomers in the crowd spoke of it as a well known star, and which was first observed upwards of twenty years ago. There had been no previous record of it, but it had not been visible for an unknown period before it was seen by them. Some comparatively recent observations suggest that this little star is slightly variable in its light. Astronomers may be said to be in little agreement of it; they admit the possibility that this minute fixed star may be the very one which in Tycho's time astonished the world with its sudden but fleeting splendor. Finally photographs have been made of this star and of the sky in its neighborhood, and astronomers occasionally take a look at it with their telescopes, so that if it ever does burst forth with unwonted brilliance the news will not be long in reaching the public.

One word more, based upon the supposed period of cycle of Tycho's star. It has been observed that the two alleged appearances previous to 1572 were 319 years apart, with between the later of these and Tycho's only 308 years intervened. The mean of these three periods would be 318½ years. It is now about two months more than 320 years since Tycho looking up at the star blazing ever his head. If that star is to reappear in our sky it is now overdue.

THE APPARITION TO THE SHEPHERDS.

GARRETT P. SERVISS.

CHRISTMAS ON A RED RIVER PLANTATION.

(For the Sunday Gazette.)

The first instalment of the annual return of this season of hilarity is big-killing time. This comes early or late, according to frost, but from that time on—be it late or early—there is no more work in the darkies, no more study up with children, no more picking up chips and minding the baby in pickaninnies. They have "Christmas in de bones!"

The darkies begin to save up eggs and nuts, to make persimmon beer, and to watch for the fattest 'possum haunts in the bottom, while the children, black and white, begin to save up big binders, inflated and dried, for a cannonade before the big house door, at day-break Christmas morning.

The cotton is nearly all picked, only scrappy remnants of it whiters here and there over the brown fields of stalks. Great stacks of it are heaped about the barn doors, and the old gin sings and groans and creaks and tosses, from sun-rise to sun-set, like some huge, greedy monster trying to bit up a year's rations in a day.

The negroes sing too, and laugh and joke and play hookey. When Jo should be hilling potatoes he is leaning on his hoe making bets with his neighbor as to who will catch the other's "Christmas" and when Ben is presumably hunting the cows, he is loafing under the big bare oaks in the bottom, singing:

"Chris'mas comes but once a year,
Oh, ho, ho, my honey!
Every nigger wants his shear
Oh, hi ho, my honey!"

And so the day wears on.

The shadows lengthen eastward. Ben comes home with the cows. The fat old turkeys turn round and round on their roosts, and the wood chopper's chorus rings from the cabin yards.

THE FAMILIAR OLD CARRIAGE.

Its time ole Miss and ole Massa were back.

Aunt Milly strains her eyes from the kitchen door, coffee-pot in hand, as she adds an extra handful of berries to the grinding and sings.

"King Jesus rides a milk white hoss,
Soo de bloodie! bloo!
He rides aim up an' down de cross,
Soo de bloodie! bloo!
Oh pere Dangul, who's on de lord's side!
Oh pere Dangul, who's on de lord's side!"

Coney hops armful after armful of firewood on the back porch, and Harriet makes way for a huge hock log which he leaves behind the andirons, piling in front of them green logs and light wood till the room is a blaze of warmth and glory—for ole miss will be cold when she gets home. At last it comes—the familiar old carriage, creeping like a beetle over the brow of the big hill. Away flies the escort of children and dogs, screaming and running over the rutted road, across the pasture.

Harriet stands, broom in hand, calling to them from the porch her voice lost in the wind, and the firelight dancing back to her through the open door.

Aunt Milly sings on, putting in the biscuits to bake, and giving the coffee a final turn through the dripper.

Creak goes the heavy pasture gate, pushed, scraping the ground, by slim brown arms and sturdy yellow legs. It comes the carriage and stops. Then such a clamoring over wheels, such a cuddling on seats—three and four deep—the "baby" in mother's lap and the pickaninnies on the floor under the buffalo robes, and hanging on behind. Then on they come, the tires rattling, the horses snorting, the curtains flapping, the children laughing, the dogs barking and ole Miss and ole Massa smiling.

Home sweet home!

The carriage is unloaded. Aunt Milly dishes the groceries (she has much personal pride as a king would claim his titles.) Harriet takes charge of the mysterious packages and the children are diverted with a bag of nuts and candy.

Then comes supper—great thin slices of pink fried ham, with its red gravy heaped on cones of white boiled rice, waffles and butter; and coffee—"as is coffee."

Then comes sleep.

She lays her warm white finger-tips on earth and sky; on human eye-lids and human hearts; on human cares and human joys; she breathes on the face of master and slave, negro and brute, child and mother, and all sleep. The moon comes up in low silvery mistiness, and smiles and keeps watch over the sleepers, the houses, the barns and pens, the ponds and jungles, and the silent fallow fields.

All is rest.

Only the rivers still run on, roaring and complaining over its sags and quicksands. It is bloody and treacherous looking, but they know it and love it—and God keeps them all.

And now, hurrah for Christmas!

The cakes are baked, row upon row, iced and candy-decked, they sit upon the pantry shelves. The pudding is made and mince pies by the dozens. Turkeys are roasted, stuffed with bread crumbs, sage and onions; a barbecued shoat lies brown, crisp and whole, with a red apple in its mouth; and 'possum and taters simmer in oily deliciousness.

Company is coming from town, and the darkies are going to have a dance in the barn after the children have had their Christmas tree.

Miss Mattie has been at work all day with her girl friends who are visiting her, and young Mars Willie has climbed to the top of the barn, getting his great clothes dusty and his black curls full of cobwebs, fixing the tree and hanging the presents for the "little niggers."

The candles on the brackets around the wall are lighted, and an old three-legged sheet-iron stove in a corner gets red-hot and tries to go up its own flue, warming the room.

Still the doors must be guarded to keep out inquisitive antiquisitive eyes. The carriages and buggies have come from town, carrying their loads of merry-makers to the hospitable porches. The girls are dressing and chattering upstairs, the young men drinking toddy in Mars Willie's room and the city horses munching sweet hay and good red river corn in the stables. Some boys and girls have come overfrom the neighboring plantations on horseback, and the dogs are barking at the unusual stir and excitement. Now the barn doors are thrown open.

In rush the children, and their scarcely less eager mothers. Old Santa is there, obsequious, and free handed, familiar with each name and its corresponding face. Mars Willie is missing, but who notices that? Is not Christmas—everybody.

All are remembered, from grauny Tilda, who is 103, to the tiniest, nameless pickaninnie on the plantation. Black eyes dance, white teeth grin. Ole Santa dances, too, highly pleased with himself and his subjects.

Now, the children are sent to bed. The brown darkies line themselves about the walls. Uncle Ebenezer with his fiddle, and Jim with his banjo, take their places and tune up. Matt Bean must open the dance with a "breakdown." The music strikes up "Chicken in the Bread tray," and Matt shakes one foot and then the other, apparently to see that the hinges are in good order. Now he is off.

Back step and double-shuffle, pat de pigeon on wing! rock de cradle, and limpty-toe!

"Jis as easy! Git erlong dar nigger!"

"Chickun in de bread tray pock, pock, pock.

"Lady in de parlor, step, step, step!"

"Timpin, chinin, jim me rooin!"

The white folks clap their hands, sitting in chairs around the room. The darkies pat time, slapping their knees and rolling their eyes up to the rafters. The music grows faster and wilder; Matt reels and rocks and keeps up a chanting undertone of words to the tune.

Mass Willie comes in, sleek and smiling, with flakes of flat in his back hair and on his clothes.

No one notices him.

Matt carries the day.

"GIT ERLONG DAR NIGGER!"

lently roars along to the Mississippi, treacherous with snags and quicksands, fringed with green willows and silver cottonwoods, capped on the Indian Territory side, with towering red bluffs and dark green cedar brush. The ramshackle old Colbert ferry boat ploughs and grunts over its sea of blood, and the rude skiff of an Indian hunter skulks near the banks where the deer comes to drink.

Indoors, the pickaninnies roast 'taters and play hull gull, squatting in the embers by the yawning chimney corners; their mothers sew quilt rags and sing camp meeting songs, while on at the big house ole Miss pats down on a slate, as they come to her, items to put when she goes to town for Christmas trading. Over forgotten books nestle brown, black and gold heads, whispering about Christmas, and letters to Santa Claus are confidently committed to the smoke and sparks of the tall brick chimneys.

So Christmas approaches.

At last comes the climax of joyful anticipation.

Ole Miss goes to town.

Ole Massa orders the carriage, and storms and swears about neglected harness, missing cushions, unmatched bridles, holling on his big buckskin gloves and superintending Aunt Milly while she covers the floor of the carriage with hot rocks and tucks the buffalo robe over them.

What does not the trip to town signify?

Citron, raisons, currants, fruit and nuts, pulverized sugar and assorted candies, wine for jellies, brandy for eggnog and rum for the punch and pudding and, best of all, and most bewildering, these mysterious packages, great and small, to be put away unopened and unexplained till Christmas eve.

Always goes the old coach, flanked by a mottled escort of children and followed by the sound of god-speeding voices as far as the pasture gate. Then, on alone, over the marshy prairies and wind swept winding road to town.

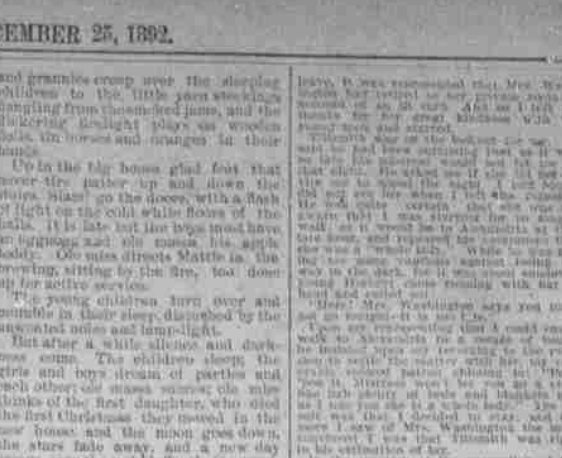
Now comes an interregnum on the plantation. Servants and children hold high carnival. Work drags; midday dinner is late; allotted tasks are forgotten. The children rave through the house, leaving doors open, banging on the old square piano in the darkened parlor; Aunt Milly sings louder than ever as she passes from the outdoor kitchen to the dining room, and Harriet, the housemaid, scolds and threatens in vain.

Christmas comes but once a year.
Oh, hi ho, my honey!
Every nigger wants his shear
Oh, hi ho, my honey!

And so the day wears on.

The fat old turkeys turn round and round on their roosts, and the wood chopper's chorus rings from the cabin yards.

death. Pumpkins and hominies mellow and sweeten on the cabin roofs, and sweet potatoes grow sugary in the hills. The leaves turn from red to russet; wind gets a keener edge and high-pitched wail; the sun sets each evening more slanting to the southward, and the sky takes on that sheet-iron look which means a last good bye to summer. Red birds dash flashes of flame where a half month ago the mocking birds sang to the new moon. Snow birds swirl in countless droves over the barren fields, shivering as the dried fodder with the tempest of their wings, and occasional flocks of wild geese paint ragged patterns of black upon a leaden-grey sky. Over the ponds in the dips of the prairie land a thin cuticle of ice forms, freezing in waves and curves with the wind against the banks. Silent and fallow lie the wide, fertile fields, where the sandy loam of the uplands blend with the red banks of old Red river as it sol-



THE DINNER.

pretty astonished and stood not to "walk" into my eggs and all down and out, for you allus is very sudden.

"Well, I thought in curious manner of possible stability; some money deserves for there was but one week.

The dreams intended for whole month of use, and on that week's work my two hands only are used to take care of cattle or pots, or which to hang them, consequently what horse everywhere abounded. Then there were long ground-sheets, tents and other articles.

The necessary called his name Hannibal, and he was born on the plantation belonging to Mr. General Washington, and he was seized through grandfather's side of the family, and was a grandson of the chief of Ashanti, who was killed in the battle of Dodowa in 1826. He was so fine that I had felt liberty to visit the room very often to see a specimen of the human species in the shape of a man, and to satisfy myself that he was not a mulatto, or a cross-breed racial into the mixture of white blood, but was actually the real negro of Africa. I was introduced to that reality if I may say so, and made acquaintance to Mr. General Washington, who was called in the family Mr. Washington, who was called in the family Mr. Washington, who was called in the family Mr.