

# **THE SIGNS IN THE CHRISTMAS FIRE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649175215

The signs in the Christmas fire by William Allen Knight

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**WILLIAM ALLEN KNIGHT**

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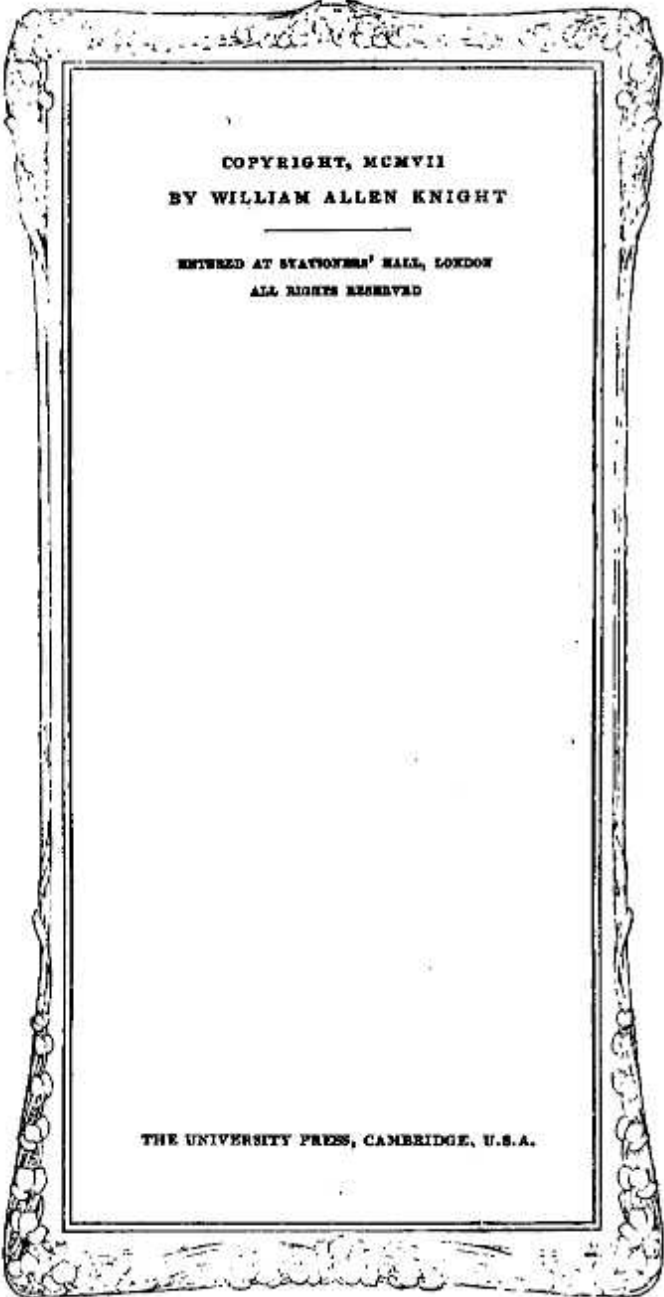
THE SIGNS  
IN THE  
CHRISTMAS FIRE

*By*  
WILLIAM ALLEN KNIGHT

AUTHOR OF  
THE SONG OF OUR SYRIAN GUEST



THE PILGRIM PRESS  
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO  
MCMVIII



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To

*The dear father and mother  
Who first taught me to love  
The story of the wise men  
And the star*

## PROLOGUE

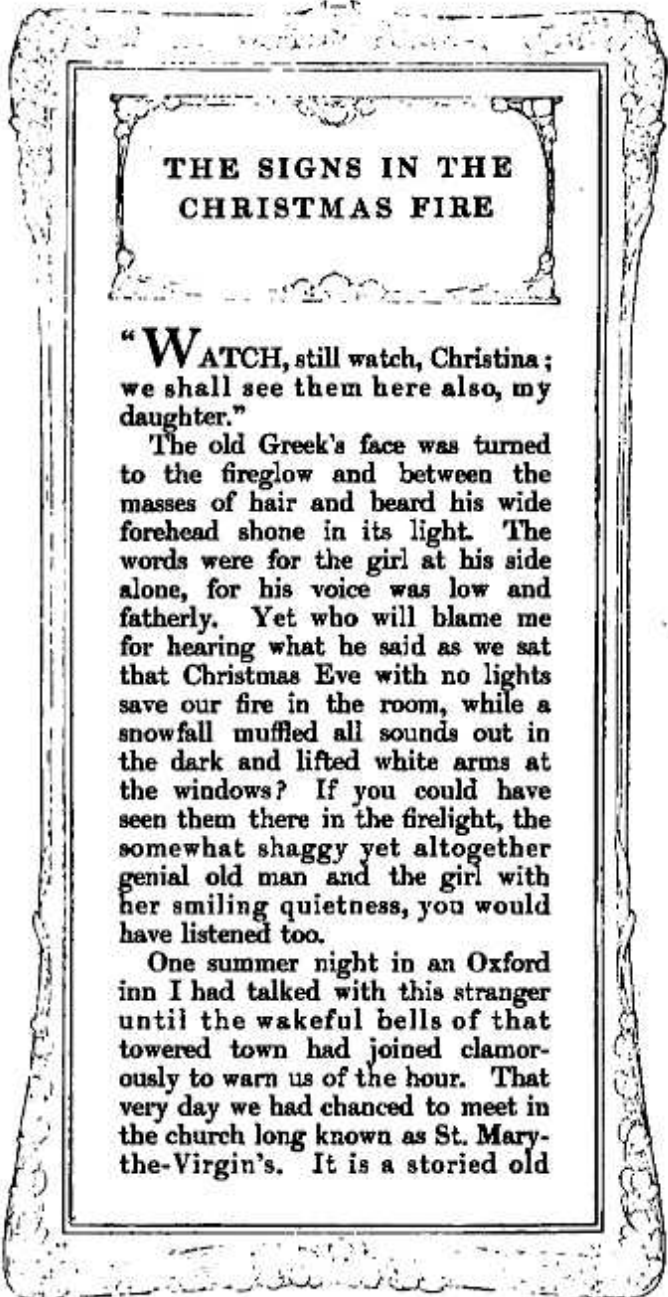
NOW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem.

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.

MATTHEW II.





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“**W**ATCH, still watch, Christina; we shall see them here also, my daughter.”

The old Greek's face was turned to the fireglow and between the masses of hair and beard his wide forehead shone in its light. The words were for the girl at his side alone, for his voice was low and fatherly. Yet who will blame me for hearing what he said as we sat that Christmas Eve with no lights save our fire in the room, while a snowfall muffled all sounds out in the dark and lifted white arms at the windows? If you could have seen them there in the firelight, the somewhat shaggy yet altogether genial old man and the girl with her smiling quietness, you would have listened too.

One summer night in an Oxford inn I had talked with this stranger until the wakeful bells of that towered town had joined clamorously to warn us of the hour. That very day we had chanced to meet in the church long known as St. Mary-the-Virgin's. It is a storied old

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building and he was standing near the altar looking down at the little gravestone which, sheltered in a holy place, bears the name *Amy Robsart*. He seemed to be musing on the story of that ill-fated young wife. As I stood near him he turned, pointed to the stone and shook his head, gazing at me out of misty eyes.

That night while a rain was falling we settled in a snug corner at the inn, and so fell to talking as even strangers will do at such times. What he said before we parted would make a story good to tell; but it is enough now that I listened until the bells of Oxford broke the stillness with long pealing, and then, far up the rambling stairs, lay wondering who this stranger could be, until the sound of the rain on the roofs was lost in sleep.

It happened that I did not see him again till a day when I spied him walking slowly in a crowded street of my own city in America. He was quickly alert and guarded at first, but was hearty enough after he had placed me in his memory. We strolled, chatting as we went, until we came into the quaint enclosure of a once fashionable square whose elms and dwellings are left now to a fading gentility. "Here are my lodgings, sir," he said, stopping abruptly. "Will you not give

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me the pleasure of receiving you within?"

The old-time knocker brought a speedy response. It was a girl who stood in the door with beaming face and lifted arms—a girl maidenly, though molded like a little woman as is the way with daughters of the East, glowing in her joyousness, and by every token of feature, voice and bearing, well-bred. At sight of me she quickly quieted her welcome. For my part I stood perplexed. To that moment I had known the old man at my side as a lone traveler only!

"My daughter, sir," he said, smiling with a pride which lighted up his eyes. "Christina—your father's friend."

So was it, as men see ways past finding out, that among the guests in our home on the approaching Christmas Eve were Dr. Melisander and his daughter.

Would that you could have seen the picture Christina made in the brightness of our fire when I overheard those words, "Watch, still watch, Christina; we shall see them here also, my daughter." Outlined in the ruddy light her form moved not at all. The small hands folded in her lap did not stir. So eager was her gaze into the fireplace that the waves of lustrous black hair on