

The Nativity: Christmas Hymn.

NIGHT of wonder, night of glory;
Night all solemn and serene,
Night of old prophetic story,
Such as time had never seen;
Sweetest darkness, softest blue,
That these fair skies over know.

Night of beauty, night of gladness:
Night of nights—of nights the best,
Not a cloud to speak of sadness,
Not a star but sings of rest:
Holy midnight, beaming peace,
Never shall thy radiance cease.

Happy city, dearest, fairest,
Blessed, blessed Bethlehem!
Least, yet greatest, noblest, rarest,
Judah's over sparkling gem;
Out of thee there comes the light
That dispelleth all our night.

Now thy King to thee descendeth,
Borne upon a woman's knee;
To thy gates his step he bendeth,
To the manger cometh he;
David's Lord and David's Son,
This his cradle, this his throne.

He the lowliest of the lowly,
To our sinful world has come;
He, the holiest of the holy,
Cannot find a human home.
All for us he yonder lies,
All for us he lives and dies.

Babe of weakness, child of glory,
At thy cradle thus we bow;
Poor and sad thy earthly story,
Yet the King of Glory thou;
By all heaven and earth adored,
David's Son and David's Lord.

Light of life, thou livest yonder,
Shining in thy heavenly love,
Naught from thee our souls shall sunder,
Naught from us shall thee remove.
Take these hearts and let them be
Throne and cradle both to thee!

—Horatius Bonar, D.D.

Christmas in Germany.

The ideal Christmas is in Germany. All classes, the old and the young, Emperor and peasant alike, enjoy the festival. Yet it is distinctively the day of the children, and as such has been celebrated by Germany's greatest bards, from Klopstock to Otto Rognetto; and Goethe, Schiller, and even such a grim cynic as Heine, have enshrined the day in undying verse. The German idea of the day, too, is one of sacred sentiment. The lesson taught to the young is, that the offerings of the Christmas-tree are from the Saviour, testifying his love for little children.

The Weihnacht man (Christmas man), is supposed to distribute his favours to the good children; but so impartial is he in apportioning his gifts, that all children are good. Thus the religious instinct is cultivated in a most beautiful and telling way, and the anniversary is indeed a happy one for the children of Germany, where the Christmas-tree had its birth, and where all the delightful festivities of Christmas, as known in England and Canada first took root.

As it is a boast of the Jews that they founded the family, so it may be a proud one of the Germans that they have given to children a day in the year, the approach of which they always eagerly await.

Many tender and touching stories of this Saxon outgrowth are told in many forms of German and Norse literature, to the delight of the young; but, perhaps, Hans Andersen has done more to hit the children's fancy in this regard than any author of our time. There is also a beautiful poem by Hebel, "Christ Boun," which celebrates the ceremonies on Christmas-eve, and which gives an adequate idea of that sentimental side of the German nature which shines so resplendently in the poetry, painting, and music of the Fatherland.

A Visit to a Japanese Temple.

BY REV. W. C. KITCHIN.

WHAT Mecca is to the Mohammedan world, Asakusa is to the Japanese; what St. Peter's is to Rome, the Temple of Kuanon is to Asakusa. He who has not seen the shrine of the "Thousand-armed Goddess of Mercy," has not beheld the cultus of the most popular deity in the Japanese pantheon. Asakusa, once a distinct village, later a suburb, and now a district of Tokio, is classic ground. Here, comprised within a surprisingly small area, are to be found illustrations of all that is pious in the eyes of paganism, and all that is revolting to natural morality. In a word, Japan in miniature can here be studied. Here is the most famous temple in the empire, thronged from dawn till dark with the devotees of a false faith. Close by, places of pleasure and haunts of sin abound. Right at hand are the execution grounds, red with the blood of countless criminals. In this terrible region are laid the plots of many native poems and novels. More visited than any other locality in Tokio, perhaps in all Japan, its character is fittingly described by Bishop Wiley: "Here have been murders, suicides, revenges, debaucheries, etc., enough to curse the whole empire."

Shortly after my arrival in Japan, I visited, in company with a number of friends, this celebrated centre of worship. Through three miles of dirty streets, lined on either side with open shops and dingy wood-coloured and weather-beaten fronts, we rolled in our jinrikishas, drawn by fleet-footed coolies. Alighting at the outer gateway of the grand entrance to the temple, we walked along a broad stone paved avenue, through an inner gate and up to the huge temple, with its lofty front and imposing roof, sweeping upward from the caves in broad parabolic curves. "Ancient, holy and dirty," is the usual verdict passed by tourists upon this venerable sanctuary; and I saw no reason why I should differ from the majority. On both sides of the avenue above mentioned are ranged hundreds of booths, where is offered for sale every toy the imagination of babyhood ever conceived of. Pleasure and piety in Japan go hand in hand. Religion and recreation are twin sisters; and in these latter days to visit

a temple is synonymous with going on a pleasure excursion, and at Asakusa every day is held in high festival. Around the temple, beautifully adorned with trees and flowers, are the public gardens, where the worshipper, turning from the altar of great Kuanon, can indulge in any pastime, "wise or otherwise," good, bad or indifferent, to which his inclination may draw him.

Coming, going, meeting, crossing each other's paths, surging backward and forward, swaying this way and that, this living torrent of heathenism in motion at early morn and ceasing only with the daylight, rolls on and on day after day, week after week, through months and years unceasingly. Turn now from the thronging multitudes without to the temple's idols and worshippers within. At the head of the broad flight of stone steps leading into the temple courts, on either side of the entrance, stand two hideous figures, mammoth-sized and fierce featured, representing the male and female principles in the Chinese philosophy; for the goddess of mercy herself is an imported deity, having been introduced into Japan some thousand years ago by the Chinese. In a stall in the temple are kept the Albino ponies, sacred to the divinity, and numerous figures of gods and demigods are ranged throughout the temple; conspicuously among these the statue of one of Buddha's disciples, worshipped here as the god of healing, and whose nose and hand are entirely rubbed off from the pressure of suffering hands through scores, and doubtless hundreds, of years. The main altar is inclosed behind a stout wire screen, before which stands a huge cotter, to receive the offerings of the faithful, and no Japanese worships until he has thrown in his mite. Pay, pray, play, is paganism's programme for its people.

In the courts of this heathen temple what a babel of sounds! What grotesque sights! Clouds of pigeons, whose homes are in the upper portion of the temple, even over the sacred altars, sweep down on whirring wings to pick up a handful of rice flung to them as a "heave-offering" by some pious hand. People of all ages, prostrate or kneeling in their worship; the murmuring of prayer, the clashing of gong and drum, the loud, shrill chanting of the priests, the tinkling of bells, the cooing of doves; gay laughter from the young and hilarious, sighs and sobs, mingling with the rush and roar of the multitude, ever advancing and always receding—the whole scene makes, from its very weirdness, a profound impression upon a Christian missionary who for the first time sees it. Yet even in the very centre of Japanese paganism, appears a ray of hope. The most popular temple is dedicated to a goddess of mercy, and close by her altar stands the god of healing. Do we not perceive in this fact the evidence of a hungering and thirsting upon the part of this people for more than human sympathy, more than human compas-

sion? And may we not hope that when the loving character of our Christ becomes more fully known to them, they will turn with gladness from their idols to fall at the feet of the Great Physician and Shepherd of his people?

A Christmas Mission.

SUCH a stormy Christmas morning as it was! The snow lay in great drifts along the village streets, and was still falling—the white flakes whirling and flying until they almost blinded one. God help the poor on such a day!

Margaret was very happy that Christmas morning, in spite of the storm without, for everything within her home was so cosy and beautiful and loving; so many gifts had been showered upon her that she scarcely knew whom to thank first.

"I have too much," she said; "everybody is too good to me," and the blue eyes glistened with tears.

She was just going to breakfast when she overheard the servants talking of a poor woman, who had been found the night before, in a miserable shanty, without food or fire. Immediately Margaret must know where to find her. They told her as well as they could. Before they knew what she was about, she had a basketful of nourishing food and dainties packed, and in a few moments was prepared to go out in the storm.

"Miss Margaret, it is not fit for you to be going out in this storm," said Ellen, the cook; "you will get your death."

"I guess not, Ellen," said Margaret, laughing rather soberly. "If some people can stand this weather without food and fire, I certainly can in my comfortable clothing."

"But you have not had your own breakfast."

"Do you think that I could enjoy it while I knew that some one was starving? Why, Ellen, every mouthful would choke me."

She soon found the poor creature she was seeking, to whom she seemed an angel as she entered the door and came to the wretched pallet upon which she lay. And so she was an angel—one of God's "messengers" sent to cheer and comfort one of his weary children.

Margaret soon found a neighbour to build a warm fire, and make things as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, while she herself saw that the poor woman ate a good breakfast.

She then left her, promising to come again soon. She wondered why it was that the way home seemed so short and the air so much warmer. Was it not because she had received in her heart the blessing of him who said: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me?"

Will you not make some one happy this Christmas that you too may receive the blessing of the Christ-child?