

## The Babe in Bethlehem.

BY E. M. COMSTOCK.

Into a world of sin and pain  
The Saviour comes to-day;  
We'll seek the manger where he lies,  
And grateful homage pay.

A new star blazes in the East,  
Celestial anthems ring,  
The magi haste with gold and myrrh  
To greet the new-born King.

O wondrous babe! one with our race  
In frail mortality,  
Yet one with him whose countless years  
Aro from eternity.

These lips shall speak with mighty power,  
Bidding the waves be calm;  
And into earth's sore, bleeding heart  
Drop a soft, healing balm.

These eyes shall weep their pitying tears  
With those who mourn their dead,  
And look with sorrow on the lost,  
And all uncomforted.

These hands shall touch the moving bier,  
And life from death shall spring;  
These arms shall lift "the little ones,"  
And clasp the wandering.

These feet shall press sad Calvary's hill  
Mid crowds who jeer and frown;  
This head be bowed in agony  
Beneath a mocking crown.

This heart must bear the world's great sin,  
Itself without a stain,  
That so a Father's hand of love  
May reach us all again.

O thou who "bringest gifts to men,"  
Give us, this blessed day,  
A glimpse of heaven, thy glorious home,  
And light our shadowed way,

Till we behold thee—not as now,  
But our unclouded eyes  
Shall see "the beauty of the King"  
In his own Paradise!

## Hannah's Christmas.

"HOPE ye'll hev a merry Christmas to-morrer, Hanner," said David Wray, proprietor of the little store at the settlement on Haddock Mountain.

"Thank ye kindly, David, an' now give me six sticks of candy, three on 'em peppermint, an' three birch," said the woman, taking her bundles from the rude counter.

"I'll 'low these is fer Reub's Christmas," he said, taking down the candy-jar from the window.

Old man Crapple, who had been a mildly interested observer, now came forward as Hannah was going out. "Goin', be ye, Hanner?" he said. "This is capital weather fer Christmas, now, aint it? We haint hed no heavy snow ter block up the roads. Be ye wantin' anythin' done to yer place? Ef so, jes' say th' word!"

Being assured she was in no immediate need of friendly offices, he wished her "a merry Christmas, ter-morrer," and withdrew to the fire-place.

Before the door stood her primitive sled, on the seat of which was an overgrown boy who held the reins over a sleek gray mare. Seeing her come out, he chuckled gleefully, pointing to the candy-jar now restored to its place.

"Now, aint it? aint it jes'—?"

As he was given to uttering broken sentences, she gently nodded as she placed her bundles under the bear-skin

robe, and climbed in beside him. The mare started off briskly, and they speedily left behind the few log houses, the store and blacksmith's shop. The wooden runner sank softly into the snow. The crows went heavily flapping overhead, and a flock of birds twittered as they perched upon some dead mullein.

But as the narrow road crawled upwards into the heart of the hills, all sounds of life died away and nothing was heard save the occasional soft thud of the falling snow that had been massed upon the trees. The perspective of the woods stretched away a silent land of magical dreams; the very cascades were mute—frozen into silver ribbons upon the bare rock faces.

But Hannah and Reuben—mountain-born and bred—were not oppressed by silences that were part of their existence. As they jogged along, they knew well where, after a level space, they would come upon the clearing with its thirty acres of land, and the log cabin that was their home.

The mare knew it, too, for breaking her trot, she started into a ridiculous canter, and did not stop until she reached the barn and greeted her foal within it with a loud whinny.

A team of dun oxen stretched their necks over the fence-rail, a white-faced cow and a brindled heifer were pulling down wisps of hay on the sunny side of a barraok. In the pen close by grunted four fat pigs, while under a shed, black, red-combed hens and a cock were scratching the loose gravel. These were Hannah Byles's "critturs." This was the home where she had lived all her days.

In her youth Hannah had been the mountain belle; a pretty, amiable girl, so docile that Luther Byles, her father, averred "thet thet Hanner of his'n couldn't be made to find downright fault with th' old bad un hisself; she wer thet soft-hearted thet th' critturs even hed no fear of her."

He himself idolently relied on this soft-heartedness. He knew the team would be watered without his help when they came from the field; that the cow would lose in the barn-yard that ugly gear that kept her from breaking fence while in pasture; and that the lame sheep would have its wants supplied.

He "lowed there wa'n't his gal's equal in th' hull world," his known world being bounded by the valley on one side, and Pottsville, where the county court was held, on the other. Perhaps if he had been more a man of the world, he would never have taken so entirely on trust the winning young stranger who, when Hannah was eighteen, found his way into the solitudes of Haddock Mountain and was entertained at Luther's cabin.

The mountaineers were one and all pleased with him, but were considerably disturbed in their slow minds when it became known "thet he an' Luther's Hanner hed ben jined together by the elder to Pottsville."

Discovering, however, that her parents were agreed to the match, and that her husband left her with them in his frequent jaunts to the world beyond, they mildly accepted matters "ez somethin' that hed ter be."

A year after, one cheery Christmas morning, a boy-baby was born to Hannah. But by this time her husband had grown tired of this episode in his life—his simple, ignorant wife and her rustic congeners—and being a man devoid of moral principle, deliberately left her, and she never saw him again. For weary months she refused to believe in his perfidy, then, when hope was dead, she made no outcry.

"She hed allers bin a gal of few words," Luther said pityingly.

Her child was the apple of her eye. He was a beautiful, healthy little fellow, but the neighbours really felt it to be their duty to expostulate against the Byleses setting too much store by him. Idols were a snare of the Evil One. But, poor baby! his sad fate embalmed him forever in their sympathies, and many a mountain mother told the story over and over to her sad-eyed little ones. We will tell it in Luther's own words, as he told it with despairing iteration to his last days.

"We wer gone ter th' settlemint fer some notions, Melindy an' me, that mornin', an' Hanner an' Bobby were to hum alone. 'Twer a purty day an' she wer out of doors with him, pickin' posies down thar by the turn in the road, when she jes' heered that colt Burney makin' a racket in the lane.

"Ye know thier's planks thar fer the critturs ter git over the brook; an' thar wer a bad hole into't thet I'd bin meanin' fer ter tinker up a long spell, but it hed kinder passed along an' no harm come till thet thar mornin', when it hed ter be thet Burney must git his foot into't.

"Ye know Hanner's thet soft-hearted she can't 'bide nothin' ter be in trouble, so she jes' leaves Bobby settin' on the edge of the woods, an' tellin' him not ter stir, she goes down ter see ter the colt. Waal, Burney was a restless young crittur, an' was mighty scared, an' she hed trouble ter keep him from breakin' his leg; but she managed ter git him free, an' then she hurried back ter Bobby.

"But, bless you, man, Bobby weren't thar! Jes' his leetle shoe lay by a stun wi' th' posies into't.

"Queer, wa'n't it, thet the minute we come along the road an' I heered Hanner callin' him, I knew somethin' wer wrong! Th' hull settlemint ter a man turned out ter hunt up that leetle creetur, but he wa'n't ter be found, jest ez ef a wild varmint hed cotched him, or the earth swallowed him up.

"But ther' come a time when we jes' hed to give it up an' set down quiet. When it come frost an' cold an' we uns hed ter shet the door of evenin's, 'twere jest ez ef we wer shettin' thet baby out, an' it war ez ef we could hear his leetle voice off in th' cold an' dark, wailin', 'Mammy mammy!' Seemed ez ef his

leetle sperrit must be walkin'! An' Hanner! Why, man, 'twere enough ter break a heart of stun ter hear her go on, an' her allors a creetur of sech few words!

"What hev I did thet I should lose my baby this cruel way?" she cried. "Ef I could hev held him in my arms an' kissed his breath away; ef he could a' gone straight from lookin' inter my eyes ter th' angels, I could hev borne it; but oh, ter hev my lammie wanderin', starvin', dyin', an' wonderin' why mammy war so cruel ez not ter come fer his callin'. Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

"Pore child! it did seem ez of she war questionin' the Almighty, but arter a while she quieted down, fer yer know thet is ez hes ter be!"

Only a few more years, however, and Luther repeated the pitiful story no longer, for death claimed him; but his last words were to Hannah, "When I get yonder, daughter, an' find leetle Bobby, I'll tell him how ye grieved 'bout his dyin' thet lonesome way."

After Luther's death his wife speedily followed him, as if she could not exist without his rugged companionship; and Hannah was left alone. Gentle and childlike, she was not incapable. Luther's manner of educating his girl had been to bring her up in a full knowledge of his agricultural operations, so that she was not at a loss to till her farm advantageously.

Physically she was strong and well, and in all probability length of days lay before her. The mountaineers regarded her with pitying favour, and in a manner regarded her as a legacy left in their trust, and were always ready to help her in neighbourly fashion. And she recompensed them as she was able in simple, kindly ways.

A poor woman dying and leaving her boy—a natural, as they called him—homeless, Hannah took him to her home and gave him of her best; and the folks "lowed it wer good fer both of 'em, fer now Hanner could hev companion an' help with th' cheres, an' poor Reub could hev vittles an' house-room."

So the years came and went, bringing seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, until at last there dawned upon Hannah that Christmas morning that old man Crapple and Store-keeper Wray had wished to be a merry one.

In these remote solitudes, Christmas festivities were simple. Although greens were plentiful, the country people never used them to bedeck their dwellings, and Christmas-trees were an innovation that had not yet gladdened the juveniles. But they suspended stockings beside the cavernous fire-places, to which, at gray dawn, stole breathless children, eager to rifle their rude and scanty contents.

Thus it was that Reuben, almost before the day had fairly broken, taking down his blue stocking, chuckled ecstatically over the six sticks of solid sweetness and the peculiarly shaped doughnut-mau found therein.