

Even the cross is not found here, nor is the crucifix. Instead there are flowers, wreaths of roses, children playing, and inscriptions expressing exulting, bounding, gladness. Joy is the key note of these memorials of early Christian life. They buried their dead not as those who sorrow without hope, but as those who rejoice in the blessed promise of the future.

And among these inscriptions one figure is to be found very often. In the earlier Catacombs it is the one sign of Christian faith and life. The figure is that of a young and lusty shepherd. In one hand is a crook or shepherd's pipe, and on his shoulder he carries a lamb, which he holds with the other hand. We all know who he is. This was the thought that brought joy to those early Christians in the midst of their sufferings and sorrows:—the Good Shepherd has found the lost sheep, and is bearing him home on His shoulders. This was the old time Christmas spirit.

Long centuries have since come and gone. Our own churchyards now, with their cypresses, and veiled urns, and mourning figures, perhaps tell the story that sorrow has drowned the joy in many of our lives. But it need not be so. The Good Shepherd beareth His sheep. He calms their fear and trembling. He fights their foes, and wishes their mournful cry to be silenced in the comfort of His presence. G. M. W.

THE JOY AT BETHLEHEM.

In the inn of Bethlehem there were many going to and fro, and much hurry and disquietude, while caravans were unloading or making up their complement of passengers, and the divan presented a spectacle of many costumes, and resounded with wrangling and barter and merriment. But in a stable hard by there was a tender joy too deep for words, and a stillness of adoration which seemed to shut out the outer world; for Mary had brought forth her first-born Son and laid Him in the manger, and her heart and that of Joseph were full of overflowing, and angels were gazing down from above on the mystery of the Holy Incarnation.

The soul of man is a noisy hostelry, full of turmoil and disquietude, and giving entertainment to every vain and passing thought, which seeks admittance there. But when Christ comes and

takes up His abode in the heart He reduces it to order and peace, and though it may move amid the excitements and confusions of life, yet hath it an inner stillness which they cannot disturb or destroy, for the King of Peace is there, and Peace is the purchase of His Cross, and the last legacy of His Love and His ancient promise to his people, for so it is written:—"He hath made peace through the Blood of His Cross" "Peace I leave with you. My Peace I give unto you" "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee"—*Dean Goulburn, in Thoughts on Personal Religion.*

SINS OF OMISSION.

It isn't the thing you do, dear,
It's the thing you leave undone
Which gives you a bit of heartache
At the setting of the sun,
The tender word forgotten,
The letter you did not write,
The flower you might have sent, dear,
Are your haunting ghosts to-night.

The stone you might have lifted
Out of a brother's way,
The bit of heartsome counsel
You were hurried too much to say,
The loving touch of the hand, dear,
The gentle and winsome tone
That you had no time nor thought for,
With troubles enough of your own.

The little acts of kindness,
So easily out of mind,
Those chances to be angels
Which every one may find—
They come in night and silence—
Each chill, reproachful wraith—
When hope is faint and flagging,
And a blight has dropped on faith.

For life is all too short, dear,
And sorrow is all too great,
To suffer our slow compassion
That tarries until too late,
And it's not the thing you do, dear,
It's the thing you leave undone
Which gives you the bit of heartache
At the setting of the sun.

—*Christian Leader.*

A FATHER'S PRAYERS.

JOHN G. PATON, missionary to the New Hebrides, whose interesting autobiography has been published recently, gives the following account of his father's prayers:—

Their home consisted of but three rooms, one of which "was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table and a chair. . . . This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after

each meal, we saw our father retire, and 'shut to the door,' and we children got to understand, by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old, by the High Priest within the veil in the most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to step out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew whence came that happy light, as of a new-born smile, that always was dawning on my father's face. . . . Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that sanctuary closet, and hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal: "He walked with God, why may not I?"

THE BELLS ACROSS THE SNOW.

O CHRISTMAS, merry Christmas!
Is it really come again,
With its memories and greetings,
With its joy and with its pain?
There's a minor in the carol,
And a shadow in the light,
And a spray of cypress twining
With the holly wreath to-night,
And the hush is never broken*
By the laughter light and low,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
'Tis not so very long
Since other voices blended
In the carol and the song!
If we could but hear them singing
As they are singing now,
If we could but see the shining
Of the crown on each dear brow,
There would be no sigh to smother,
No hidden tear to flow,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

O Christmas, merry Christmas,—
This it never more can be;
We cannot bring again the days
Of our unshadowed glee.
But Christmas, happy Christmas,
Sweet herald of good-will,
With holy songs of glory
Brings holy gladness still,
For peace and home may brighten,
And patient love may glow,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL.