

O Little Town of Bethlehem.

BY PHILLIPS BROOKS.

O LITTLE town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent hours go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us we pray!
Cast out our sin and enter in;
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

A CHRISTMAS RAINBOW.

BY MARGARET H. MATHER.

A MOST unusual thing was happening. It was neither Wednesday nor Sunday night, but the little mission chapel was lighted as if for service and the Sunday-school teachers were going in.

The small boys and girls of the neighbourhood, unmindful of the December wind and snow, took a keen interest in the new aspect of affairs, and crowded the chapel steps or swung around the cold tree-trunks waiting to see what was to take place.

Now and then a boy more adventurous than the rest would make a frantic attempt to climb up to a window and gaze in, but the icy ledge gave but poor support to his small fingers, and he would slide back amid the derision of the others.

"There's my teacher!" shouted a boy on the top step.

"Miss Taylor! I say, Miss Taylor! kin I come in? Kin me and Tom come in?"

"Not to-night, Joe," said a pleasant voice. "It is a meeting just for the teachers to-night."

"They're going to put you out, Joe!" called a small boy from the pavement, as he took a flying leap over a fire-plug. "I know him. He ain't no boy for a Sunday-school, he ain't. He don't learn no Golden Texas, he don't. Couldn't say, 'Flee fer yer life,' if you asked him. I'm the one on the Golden Texas. Know 'em from Adam 'n' Eve down. I ought to be librarian!"

Joe hesitated as to whether he should pitch into his adversary then and there or let him await a future settlement.

"Ragsy! Ragsy!" piped a shrill little voice that seemed to have some connection with a small blue hood near the steps, though one could not be quite sure of the relation in the darkness. "There's Mister Hawkins, Ragsy!"

Joe decided to let his offender go for the present, and joined in the general shout that went up from the small multitude as Mr. Hawkins, after a pleasant word with his little lame scholar, disappeared through the chapel door.

The boy on the pavement must have caught sight

of Ragsy's radiant face, for the next moment he shouted:

"Red Ragsy thinks Mr. Hawkin's precious as gold. 'Most as good's 'Lijah, ain't he, Ragsy? He knows where Moses was when the light went out. I seen him prowlin' round in the bulrushes."

The tone of sarcasm was too much for Ragsy's devotion, and in spite of his disproportionate size and strength he flew at the mocker in a perfect fury of passion.

A pitched battle was imminent, to the great distress of the owner of the hood, evidently Ragsy's sister. She hopped round them in an agony of fear, crying out:

"Ragsy—O Ragsy! Don't hurt him, Jumper. O, Jumper, don't knock him down!"

So great was the excitement over the possible contest that before the children realized it their superintendent was among them.

"Here's Mr. Hartwell!" cried Ragsy's sister with a gasp of relief, and in the diversion caused by this new arrival the contestants gave up their battle, and Red Ragsy sat down on a corner of the steps to get his breath.

But the Jumper, rebounding like a ball from his efforts, had a remark for the occasion:

"Is it the Christmas things ye're goin' to talk about, Mr. Hartwell? Lem me in to make a motion, won't you? We say plenty of oranges and candy, we do. We like the cheerfulest givin' that's goin', and don't you forgit it!"

The thought of such luxury was too much for the Jumper's equanimity, and he illustrated his name by another flying leap over the fire-plug.

The other children seemed to catch something of his enthusiasm, and just as Mr. Hartwell called the teachers' meeting to order there arose a shout that seemed to shake the very walls.

"It does seem rather hopeless, doesn't it?" said the superintendent, as he saw the look of dismay that crept into the faces of some of his teachers.

"How can we ever, in the little time we are to give to the work, put into those small souls the faintest idea of gentleness, courtesy, and other things that are unseen? In my opinion the Christmas time should be to them the most beautiful lesson of the year. How can we make it mean more to them than just 'candy and oranges'? How can we put into our celebration something of the tenderness and beauty of the day's meaning?"

Then it was that quiet little Miss Rogers over in the corner gave her idea. Everybody was a little surprised at first. Miss Rogers herself would have been surprised had she not been so much in earnest. She was not used to "speaking in meeting," even a teachers' meeting, and her voice sounded very strange to her when she began.

But then that idea—had it not been her one thought for weeks? Had she not imagined it by day and dreamed of it by night? Nobody there knew how great a part of herself lay in the words she said so simply: "Do you not think, Mr. Hartwell, that this year we might have a Christmas rainbow?" And then she told them what her idea was.

Three weeks later there came a day when the chimes of Christmas bells filled the air, and when it seemed to the children of the Mission Sunday-school that the evening would never come.

So many mysterious-looking boards and boxes and bundles had gone into the little chapel that a growing wonder as to the meaning of it all filled the minds of the onlookers. The Jumper declared "they'd never had nothin' like that before, and he guessed it was goin' to be Jacob's ladder with the oranges rollin' down instead of angels."

The Jumper had a vivid imagination, but even he had not guessed the truth. And he had no idea of it

even. When he sat on the very front seat that Christmas night and saw only a thick, dark curtain where he had expected a blaze of light, he was so disgusted at the downfall of his hopes that he sat perfectly still for once in his life, meditating, it may be, on the futility of expectation. Suddenly he realized that Mr. Hartwell was saying something to them, and he listened in spite of his disappointment. They all listened. They could not help it. Surely the very spirit of the hour was in the heart of the man before them as he sought in simple words to make them understand something of the love of God—the love that, shining forth so long ago in the rainbow promise of tender care for his children, had reached its greatest symbol in the Star of Bethlehem.

For a moment the Jumper forgot to wonder about the oranges as there entered into his quick mind a gleam of truth concerning higher things; and into the heart of little Ragsy there crept a feeling that it was not so bad after all to have to use a crutch and be called Red Ragsy if God cared all the same.

Then Mr. Hartwell finished speaking, and slowly before the eyes of the wondering children the thick curtain parted, and there flashed upon them a radiant rainbow stretching across the whole end of the room. Surmounting the centre point of the arch was one shining star.

To some of the children there the vision, though only a thing of lamps and tissue paper, was something celestial. It was such a wonderful rainbow too; not one of the ordinary sort at all, for from the lowest color of the arch hung all sorts of queer-shaped little bundles tied with different colored cords.

Some of the teachers now came forward having in their hands long sticks from which fluttered little strips of cambric of the same seven colors as the cords. Mr. Hartwell then explained that everybody was to have a choice, by color, of one of the packages, but in memory of Christ, who was always unselfish, nobody was to choose for himself. The boys were to choose for the girls and the girls for the boys.

The articles were so arranged that the little children could select from one end of the rainbow, the larger ones from the other. In this way the appropriateness in gifts was secured. How they all clapped when the Jumper, having selected a beautiful orange slip from Miss Taylor's stick, marched up to the rainbow to match it in color with a string tied round a blue-eyed beauty of a doll, which he chose to present to Red Ragsy's sister.

"And you needn't mind my chaffin' any more," he whispered to little Ragsy, as he slipped back again into his seat, and Ragsy's cup of happiness seemed very full.

The hour that followed cannot be described. Little Miss Rogers had to stop now and then to wipe away a tear of joy as she realized that her dream had become a reality. For she saw the gladness with which the children caught the spirit of the celebration and chose for others and not for themselves.

Finally, however, the very last package was disposed of, and the scholars with happy faces gazed upon the wonderful rainbow. Mr. Hartwell detained them only a little longer; just a moment for a three-sentence prayer of thankfulness, which they all repeated after him; another moment for a word regarding the gift they could bring to the Christmas child—of their hearts and lives; and after that they sang out in the clear, childish voices the words that they all loved to sing:

"We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful city of God."

Then the children, with the love of God around them and in their hearts, went out into the clear night, where every shining twinkle reminded them of the Star of Bethlehem.