



The Family Circle.

ON THE TRACK OF CHRISTMAS.

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

A nineteenth century child! Did you ever think what that means, little Robin and Ruby? You live in the time of the telegraph, the telephone, and the typewriter, the railway and the ocean steamer, and I don't know what else that saves minutes and muscles. How your little great-grandmothers in their day would have stared if they had been told of half the fairy-like wonders which are every-day and commonplace and matters of course to you. Why, even Christmas has grown to be lovelier and brighter in these days than it ever was before. It was a dream of delight to me in my childhood, but it has gained some charms since then, and every year it comes with new beauty and added enchantment.

"Merry Christmas!" The sweet words have a music all their own, the sweeter that everybody is saying them, and they are popping from lips which are often pursed up and crusty, as well as from those which are always smiling and bland. The cook wishes the milkman a "Merry Christmas," the mistress wishes it to the maid, the merchant says "Merry Christmas" to his customer, and, in fact, we all wish it. Like jolly Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim, the thought in our hearts is not "Merry Christmas" only, but "God bless us every one!"

There were thousands of years during which the earth waited for Christmas. There were sowing and reaping, winter and summer, and the years with their changes rolled round, but no Christmas came with its songs and gifts and its great gladness, until the angels brought the first good news of its advent.

I like to think of the Wise Men—whom tradition tells us were three kings of the East—Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthasar, journeying slowly through the desert day after day, and following the wonderful star, until at last it stood still over the manger where the infant Jesus lay. They brought gifts to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and he was himself God's gift to mankind. So you see that giving is bound into the very fibre of Christmas.

Better even than to think of the Eastern princes is it to recall the shepherds watching their flocks by night on the Judean hill-side, when, as they talked together to keep themselves alert and wakeful, the glory of God shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

And there, right above them, hovered a mighty angel, majestic and serene, who told them to "fear not," because this very day a Saviour is born in the city of David.

Suddenly through the opening skies issues a host of the seraphim, praising God and singing—singing such a strain as the earth had never heard before—and when the last sweet echo dies away the angels go back into heaven.

Then the shepherds, in the gray dawn, take their reverent journey to Bethlehem to find the young Child and his mother.

At the period of our Saviour's birth the world was ready for him in a peculiar way. For a long time there had been war and fighting everywhere, but now there was profound peace.

The great empires of Assyria, Persia, and Greece had passed away, one after the other, and the magnificent empire of Rome had succeeded them. The whole known world was under the sway of the Seven-hilled City. Augustus Cæsar was the supreme ruler of the world. Every nation paid him tribute; the Roman eagles had

safe anywhere. People had to surround their castles and homes with deep ditches, and then keep warders on their draw-bridges by night and by day lest assassins should find their way into the hall or chamber. Bold barons, and bands of robbers and marauders went roistering up and down the land, and there was nothing but riot and turmoil and plunder going on, the rule being the right of the strongest, and only that. A very, very bad rule!

With the sweet spirit brought into the world by Jesus there grew up reverence for woman, a desire to protect the weak, and a resolve on the part of the nobles to set wrongs right if they could.

So the order of knighthood came into being, and through the forest and over the mountains and into the cities rode the goodly knights, sworn to deliver all who were in peril, and to scorn every mean action.

pleasant fiction of the good St. Nicholas with his laden pack, his jingling bells, and his galloping reindeer.

English children, Dutch, Spanish, French, Norwegian, and Danish children are all in wild spirits when Christmas comes. Perhaps children on this continent are a wee bit wilder than any of the others. The stockings are hung up in the chimney corner, and with hearts full of delight the little folk go to bed, sternly determined to stay awake all night.

Strangely enough, no child ever has stayed awake all night, and no boy or girl has ever beheld the face of Santa Claus, or ever heard the prancing of his fleet-footed steeds, except in dreams. But that he is real, and that he comes some time between the dark and the daybreak, your stockings crammed with gifts testify.

Dear children, amid the pleasure of the season, I beg you not to forget the gladness which lies at the heart of Christmas. It was sung by the angels. It was brought by the Lord himself when he became a little child.

The track of Christmas is ever gaining breadth and taking to itself new glory. Christmas is kept in islands of the ocean which a little while ago were occupied by cannibals. To-day the islanders are Christians.

India, China, Japan, Syria, Africa, are joining the multitude who worship the Saviour born in Bethlehem. Wherever there are idols, and wherever there are misery, want, and sin, the true religion is slowly but surely making its way. And before many years shall have gone, Christmas will be kept the wide world round. The twentieth-century child may see that happy time when all tongues and nations shall say "Merry Christmas!"

THE CHEERFUL FACE.

Next to the sunlight of heaven is the cheerful face. There is no mistaking it—the bright eye, the unclouded brow, the sunny smile, all tell of that which dwells within. One glance at this face lifts us out of the mists and shadows into the beautiful realm of hope. One cheerful face in the household will keep everything warm and light within. It may be a very plain face, but its cheery smile

sends the blood dancing through the veins for very joy. Ah, there is a world of magic in the plain, cheerful face, and we would not exchange it for all the soulless beauty that ever graced the fairest form on earth. —Union Signal.

WHAT CAN I DO TO-DAY?

"What can I do to-day?
Not praise to win, or glory to attain;
Not gold, or ease, or power, or love to gain,
Or pleasure gay;
But to impart
Joy to some stricken heart.
To send a heaven-born ray
Of hope, some sad, despairing
Soul to cheer—
To lift some weighing doubt,
Make truth more clear,
Dispel some dwarfing care,
To lull some pain;
Bring to the fold again
Some lamb astray;
To brighten life for some one,
Now and here
This let me do to-day." —Exchange.



BABY'S FIRST CHRISTMAS MORNING.

conquered all who opposed them.

When people are at war there is little time for learning or art or commerce to flourish. It is only when peace prevails that there is time for these things. Although Rome was despotic, yet in her vast provinces she allowed a good deal of liberty, and altogether there had never been an era so fit for the coming of the Prince of Peace as the golden age of Augustus.

It was in the middle of the fourth century that Christmas was first observed as a festival. From Rome it passed over into Asia, and as years elapsed it was kept in Europe. One of the last places where Christmas was greeted with anthems and processions, strange to say, was Jerusalem, although Christian worship began there.

During the Middle Ages there sprang up in the track of Christmas what we have all read about as the institution of chivalry. There was a time when nobody's life was

The mother of the pure and lofty Bayard said to him, when he received his sword, "Serve God, and he will aid thee; be sweet and courteous to every gentleman in divesting thyself of all pride. Be not a flatterer or tale-bearer, be loyal in word and in deed, keep thy word, be helpful to the poor and orphan, and God will reward it to thee."

Can the gentlemen of to-day adopt a better code of morals and manners?

When gradually the gloom of the Dark Ages passed, and the invention of printing came, so that books were multiplied instead of being slowly copied out by hand, the track of Christmas grew wider and plainer.

In the pleasant homes of Germany the Christ-child was lovingly remembered, and the Christmas tree was lit by numbers of candles, and strung with shining balls, and hung with presents. Then came the