

OUR NEW YEARS.

ONE by one, one by one,
The years march past, till the march
is done;
The old year dies to the solemn keel,
And a merry peal from the changing bell
Ushers the other, one by one,
Till the march of the years shall at last be
done.

Bright and glad, dark and sad,
Are the years that come in mystery clad;
Their faces are hidden and none can see
If merry or sorrowful each will be;
Bright and sad, dark and glad,
Have been the years which we all have had.

Fair and subtle, under the sun
Something from us each year has won.
Has it given us treasures? Day by day
It has stolen something we prized away;
We meet with fears, and count with
tears
The buried hopes of the long-past years.

Is it so? And yet let us not forget
How fairly the sun has risen and set;
Each year has brought us some sunny
hours,
With a wealth of song and a crown of
flowers.
Power to love and time to pray
Its gifts have been ere it passed away.

We hail the new that has come in view;
Work comes with it, and pleasure too;
And even though it may bring some pain,
Each passing year is a thing of gain;
We greet with song the days that
bring;
Do they bring us trouble? 'Twill make us
strong

With smiles of hope, and not with tears,
We meet our friends in the glad new years;
God is with them, and as they come
They bear us nearer our restful home.
And one by one, with some treasure won,
They come to our hearts till they all are
gone.

—Marianne Farningham.

CHRISTMAS IN HISTORY.

BY REV. J. L. HURLBUT, A. M.

THE observance of Christmas, appropriate as it is, and now so world-wide, does not rest upon either a divine command or an apostolic precedent. There is no allusion in the New Testament to any annual Church festivals, and the early history of the Church does not mention the celebration of any day in commemoration of Christ's birth until about 180, A. D. There was for a long time no uniformity in the date of the festival, which was held variously from January to May. It is remarkable that one of the earliest references to this day, at which all the world now rejoices, should be a sad story of the age of persecution. When Diocletian was emperor of the Roman world, between 284 and 305 A. D., on one occasion, while holding his court at Nicomedia, he learned that the Christians of the neighborhood, with their children, had assembled in their church to celebrate the birth of Christ. He ordered the doors to be closed, and the church to be set on fire. His soldiers stood around to keep the sufferers within the burning building, until church and Christians fell in the flames together.

Perhaps the reasons why Christmas Day was not observed earlier in the history of the Church were, among others, that the Gospels do not assign any day in the year for the birth of Christ; that the death and resurrection of Jesus were fixed by the calendar, were more important in the plan of redemption than his birth, and hence more generally observed by the early Church; and that there was no Jewish

feast at the time of Christmas to be transferred into a Christian festival.

But the observance of a day in honour of Christ's birth grew more and more general in the Church, and about 380 A. D., in the time of Theodosius the Great, the twenty-fifth of December was finally fixed by the European Churches, and was accepted by those in the East. Why that particular date was taken cannot be known with certainty. There is the best of evidence that the birth of Jesus took place, not in the winter, but at a time in the year when shepherds and their flocks may be found together in the fields at night in Judea.

The festival of Christmas grew up at Rome, where it took the place and time of the old Saturnalia, or winter holidays of the heathen city. Indeed, many of the Christmas customs, and some of these the most beautiful, are said to have a heathen origin, and were simply transferred from the false worship to the true. Thus, hanging the houses with green was a heathen rite in Northern Europe from the earliest ages, and the lighting of tapers, and giving of presents, which seem to us to recall the midnight manger and the gifts of the magi, are yet as old as Rome itself. The holly-berries and the misletoe take us back to the Druid worship of the ancient Britons, and the yule-log, rolled in state into many a baronial hall, is a reminiscence of the German yule feast in commemoration of the sun's return at the winter solstice. Thus, as the water-jars at the marriage-feast were laden with wine at the Saviour's look, so the harmless elements of the primeval faiths took on a new meaning and beauty when touched by the Gospel of Christ.

LITTLE BEPPO.

A DULL, leaden sky. All day the snow-flakes have steadily fallen, and now, as night approaches, not a vestige of the frozen earth remains. Beppo walks wearily along, his beloved guitar held closely under his arm. He sees the lights in happy homes; he sees the children, with their faces pressed against the panes, watching with delight the fall of flakes, for to-morrow will be Christmas and the snow will aid Kriss Kringle in his visit; and a sad smile lights up his dark face, for the snow that brings happiness to them brings him deepest sorrow.

As the little wanderer strolls on, he thinks of that land of mellow sunshine far over the sea, and of the happy home he had before his parents died; and, in contrast to this, he thinks of the home he has now, and of the wicked padrone who took him from his cherished country.

These last thoughts arouse him to a sense of business, and, clinking the few cents in his pockets, he takes up his position at the entrance of a theatre which is ablaze with light. Then, blowing his breath upon his stiff, cold fingers, he plays a few wild, sweet notes upon his instrument—a prelude to "Home, Sweet Home." He watches the gayly attired people pass into the warm building, but none seem to notice the little figure shrinking in the shadow. None save the gruff, burly policeman who roughly grasps his shoulder and says "Come, young un, move along now!"

And Beppo, utterly disheartened, moves on. It has been a poor day for

business; he does not dare to go home with the few cents he has earned; and now the stern mandate of the officer has cut off his last chance of getting more.

He pauses under a gas-lamp, and, by its flickering rays, he counts his cents over. Just ten—enough for coffee and rolls; and he crosses over to a little restaurant, and is soon indulging in a bit of extravagance. Supper over, he plans where he shall sleep.

He remembers a box filled with straw which he has seen in his wanderings. He wends his way towards it, and, when ten strikes from the tall church-tower near by, Beppo is calmly asleep, his guitar pressed tenderly upon his breast.

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Twelve o'clock. As the last stroke reels out upon the frosty air, Beppo awakes from a troubled dream. His sharp ear catches the sound of voices, and he remains almost breathless.

"How are you going to work the job?" says some one in a hoarse whisper.

"It's as easy as rolling off a log," replies his companion. "The girl leaves the kitchen window unlatched, and we're in the house as nice as you please. Have you brought all the tools?"

"All in this bag," rejoins the first, and Beppo, wide awake now, hears something jingle.

"Then, ho for old Howland's silver!" chuckles the second, and the two move off.

Beppo hears their footsteps die away. He comprehends it all,—that there is to be a robbery,—and wonders how he can prevent it. The name Howland he has heard before, and he knows that he may be the means of saving much.

He arises from his cramped position, and, stretching himself, reaches for his guitar. Then, shivering as the piercing winds strike through his tattered clothing, he glides swiftly down the street—on until the bright light of a police-station greets his vision.

In broken sentences, he tells his story to the sergeant in charge, and the latter at once sends two officers out to investigate the matter.

Beppo knows that he has done his duty—he can do no more. Unnoticed, he steals out into the dark street. Two or three blocks passed, a strange feeling comes over him. The snow falls so fast that he can scarcely see before him. Sick and dizzy, he gropes his way up the steps of a private residence and falls fainting in the door-way.

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The *Herald*, two days after, contained among its advertisements the following:

IF THE LAD who gave the valuable information that led to the frustration of designs upon a Fifth Avenue house, will send his address to A—H—, Herald office, he will hear of something to his advantage.

And the following in its local department:

FROZEN TO DEATH.

Yesterday morning, while Mr. John Smith, of Blank street, was searching for his paper in the door-way, his attention was drawn to a little figure half covered by the snow. A guitar was tightly clasped in his hands. A doctor was immediately summoned and stimulants were given, but to no avail. The poor little fellow was quite dead. He was subsequently identified as Beppo, who, with his instrument, was quite well known among people in the lower district.

St. Nicholas.

A WINTER SONG.

Oh, Summer has the roses
And the laughing light south wind,
And the merry meadows lined
With dew, dawning peacocks,
But Winter has the spruces,
And the witching frosty nights

Oh, Summer has the splendour
Of the corn fields wide and deep,
Where scarlet poppies sleep
And wary shadows wander,
But Winter to his care
With diamonds everywhere.

Oh, Summer has the wild bees
And the ringing, singing note
In the robin's tuneful throat,
And the lark talk in the trees,
But Winter has the lull
Of the merry Christmas time.

Oh, Summer has the lustre
Of the sunbeams warm and bright,
And rains that fall at night
Where reds and lilacs cluster;
But deep in Winter's snow
The fires of Christmas glow.

St. Nicholas.

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF A HOLIDAY.

IT is well to have these seasons of rest from study and work—these times of joy and innocent recreation. They give us delight in looking forward to them, and pleasure in remembering them when they are gone. The old man never forgets the happiness he had when these seasons came to him in his childhood. They give him joy even now, in his old days, when he thinks of them.

How to make the best of a holiday is often a very important question. We ought to get all the good out of it we can; but in this world joy and sorrow so often lie near each other that we need care lest, in the pursuit of joy, we step over the boundary line, and find ourselves in the field of sorrow. Many a holiday begun in sunshine has ended in a storm.

Selfishness will spoil any holiday, or any other day; so that the very means which some foolish people take to obtain enjoyment brings them only grief. We get a great deal more happiness by trying to make other people happy than by selfishly thinking of ourselves only.

Especially on Christmas, the day of days, ought we to try to be unselfish; for this day celebrates the birth of him who was the most unselfish being the world ever saw. Because of God's great gift to men in the person of his Son, and because this Son gave himself to the world, we ought on Christmas-day to see what we can do to make others happy. This is the most appropriate way of keeping Christmas.

What we do on Christmas will be a good thing to do on every other day of the year. To make others happy it is not necessary to neglect our work and try to do theirs. That might be mere meddlesomeness, and, in any case, is uncalled for. We must do our own work, and make it a part of that work to help others in every way we can. This is often an easy matter. A kind word, a gentle look, a loving deed, do not cost much, yet they accomplish much, but whether they give little labour or much, our duty is still the same. Unselfishness will help us to enjoy life as though it were all a holiday.—*Classmate.*