

Christmas Gifts.

Long, long ago, in manger low,
Was cradled from above
A little child in whom God smiled,
A Christmas gift of love.
When hearts were bitter and unjust,
And cruel hands were strong,
The noise he hushed with hope and trust,
And Peace began her song.

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Pleasant Hours:

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Rev. W. H. Withrow, D.D., Editor.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 2, 1896.

A TALE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

"Valeria, the Martyr of the Catacombs: A Tale of Early Christian Life in Rome." By W. H. Withrow, D.D., author of "The Catacombs of Rome and their Testimony Relative to Primitive Christianity," etc. Toronto: William Briggs. Montreal: C. W. Coates. Halifax: S. F. Huestis. Illustrated. Price, 75 cents.

The success of this book is indicated by the fact that a fifth edition of three thousand copies has just been printed. It has been republished both in London and New York. The author has devoted much time to the study of his subject. His large work on "The Catacombs of Rome" is not yet superseded as the best on the market, after twenty years' steady sale.

The author has endeavoured in this book, in the form of a story, to convey the substance of the information contained in this expensive work. It gives a vivid picture of early Christian trial and triumph in Rome during the last of the Ten Great Persecutions, that under Domitian. It describes the secret worship of the catacombs, the trial and persecution of the Christians, even of those of Caesar's household, and the wife and mother of Caesar himself, the turbulent scenes in market and forum and amphitheatre. It abounds in elements of heroism, pathos and tragedy, and gives a very graphic account of the conflict between Christianity and paganism for the possession of the old Roman world.

This will be a good holiday gift book, as it is handsomely bound and illustrated. It throws much light on the early Roman church to which St. Paul ministered. It describes his imprisonment and martyrdom, and the pagan legends and traditions about the great apostle and first Christians. It will thus be of much interest in connection with the Sunday-school lessons on the life of St. Paul for 1897.

JUNIOR EPWORTH LEAGUE.

PRAYER-MEETING TOPIC.

DECEMBER 13, 1896.

Hymn 118—"Jesus, the very thought of thee." Solomon's Song 5. 10.

"Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

"No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than Jesus' name,
The Saviour of mankind"

These are the verses of the hymn which are to be committed to memory. The author is Bernard of Clairvaux, translated by E. Caswell. The name of the tune is Mendelssohn.

The entire hymn is a beautiful composition, and is worthy of careful thought.

THE SUBJECT.

Read the text carefully. The whole book is a composition intended to describe the excellency of the person whose loveliness it is intended to set forth. The language used is chaste and captivating, which clearly indicates the high admiration in which the writer held his lovely spouse. The figures used deserve careful thought. "White, emblem of purity, is a colour which always commands admiration. "Ruddy" signifies healthy, attractive; taken together they signify that the person thus described is one possessing good health and prepossessing appearance; in short, such an one as would be likely to command respect.

EMBLEMATICAL OF JESUS CHRIST.

"He is fairer than the children of men." He is pure and free from sin. None could charge him with the least impurity. "He was separate from sinners," that is, he was altogether different from the entire human family. In him there was no guile. How highly he is esteemed by those who know his worth can be seen from the testimony given by his followers. "Whom have we in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth we desire beside thee." "He is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." No wonder that he is precious to them that believe, so precious that there is none with whom you can compare him.

DRIFTED AWAY.

By Edward William Thomson.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"Somebody on the island ought to be out looking, but I can't see 'em at all," said Isidore. He stood up and waved his cap and his arms.

Charley, thrusting his head out of the big coat, flattered his handkerchief, but not a soul seemed astir on the island, then inhabited by a few fishermen. Nor did the light keeper, who was probably at his supper, see the boat slowly blown away, making westward across the wind with the set of the current.

Gradually the shore spread wide behind them, and endless water loomed on either side. Still the proximity of the island kept the lads in hope. They were newly cheered when a group of indistinguishable figures began to form on the bank behind the boat-house.

"Hurrah, Isidore! They see us now!" "But what's the good, Mr. Charley?" shivered Isidore, slapping his hands together for warmth. "They can't do anything."

"Somebody'll go and tell my father, anyway. He'll soon come."

He repeated this to himself again and again as the sun sank down behind a low cloud which merged into the trees on a distant shore.

Now the staunch skiff rose and fell over the long rollers a mile west of the island, which gradually dropped lower till

His heart swam with love for his little captain. Loosening the front fold of the carpet from beneath his arm, he placed it along Charley's legs, and felt still happier, though the wind cut cruelly against his neck and face. Sometimes he had to move to conceal his convulsions of shivering.

Neither boy spoke for a long time. There was nothing to say, the desperation of the situation baffled talk. Charley kept thinking steadily of his mother. He seemed to see into her shining eyes. He was, as it were, telling her, "Don't be afraid, mother dear. I will come back, I will, I will come back!"

Isidore kept one hand on his scapulary. He thought only of saving Charley. Dumbly he asked of the figure of the Virgin in Vaudreuil church, and of the pictured saints, and of the spiritual things that he imagined behind the points of ruby light before the altar, that help might come over the waters and lift Charley away to warmth and safety.

For himself he was willing, he told those invisible presences, to go on with the wind, if only he might see Charley at the end. Charley took no thought of Isidore. He thought of the sighing breeze, the remoteness of the stars, and the grief of his mother.

When the snow-storm came Isidore said, "I'm going to get up and beat my arms together."

With that, he folded the carpet twice over Charley, and completely covered him from the storm, all so naturally that the little boy never thought of the self-sacrifice. Then Isidore vigorously flung his arms together to beat the cold out of his body. His undercoat was heavy, and he was warmly clad for ordinary experiences.

After the snow passed, Isidore still battled by exercise against the raw cold, and looked back across the deepening dusk at the lowering light-house outside Toronto Bay.

In spite of his misery and fear the reclaimed outcast was happier than ever he had been in his parish days. His heart was comforted with a great love, and despair was not yet heavy upon him. Out of such bodily suffering he had often before emerged with life.

"Listen, Mr. Charley! They're after us!" Isidore grasped the child by the foot.

Half across the wind came a tug's scream. When it ceased they shouted—not without a sense of the futility to trying to send their voices to where a red light sometimes shone, and again disappeared.

"Didn't I tell you my father would come?" cried Charley. "Do you think they see us?"

"They will—they're looking for us."

"My! I wish they'd hurry up. It's cold, Isidore. And the boat is all over snow now."

"Well, then, keep the carpet round you, and cover your face up. First I'll shake the snow off the carpet. There now. Try to keep dry, Mr. Charley."

"You're cold, aren't you, Isidore?"

"Oh, I don't mind a little cold like this."

"Why don't they come?"

"I'm afraid they're leaving us. No—here she comes. I can see her green light now."

He shouted with all his might.

"Do they hear you, Isidore?"

"The wind is against me. I'll wait till they get nearer."

The tug was coming straight down on them, Isidore thought. But she turned and went far to the westward. They shouted themselves hoarse, in vain.

When the Nixon turned again she passed across their course as far ahead as she had formerly been behind. Thrice the despairing lads saw her lights turn in the eastern and western distances, and cross their bow again. They could scarcely hear their own calls. When she turned the fourth time they lost her light in the darkness.

Charley again lay down. Isidore covered him as before, and resumed his exercise. He was conscious, as time passed, of becoming tired and numb, and he struggled rather to beat off the advancing lethargy than for heat. The sensation of being cruelly pierced had, to some extent, lessened with the chilling of his blood. He knew that his one chance of life lay in continuing that mechanical beating of his arms.

Charley, warmly sheltered, often came near the edge of sleep, only to start wide awake at some louder splash, with a freshened sense of the strangeness of the boat's motion, and of the wind's melancholy.

Sometimes, pushing down the carpet, he looked at Isidore's dim figure, and received reassurance from its constant movement.

It is not in the nature of a young boy to comprehend uncomplaining suffering



PERILS OF THE DEEP.

PERILS OF THE DEEP.

After all the progress of civilization there is one sphere in which the power of man seems of little avail. In Byron's magnificent Address to the Ocean, we read:

"Man marks the earth with ruin—his control

Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain

The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain

A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,

When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,

He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,

Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd,

and unknown.

Every autumn storm brings us records of wrecks all along the rocky coasts of Great Britain and Ireland, and on the Canadian and American seaboard, and on our great lakes. True, much has been done to lessen these evils. On every headland, lighthouses send their friendly gleam on darkest nights far and wide. At every great port, life-saving crews watch the rocket signal of distress, and, when waves are wildest, launch their life-boats to rescue drowning mariners. Recently, one life-boat crew rescued several scores of sailors, from no less than five wrecked vessels. The heroism of these brave men, and the loneliness and often perilous life in a lighthouse, will form the subject of a couple of articles in our Connexion Monthly, on "Life in a Lighthouse," and "With a Lifeboat Crew." The above is one of the many illustrations of thrilling danger and heroic rescue.

It was discernible only as a strip behind which the dim city loomed. As Charley's home dwindled down, his heart grew sorer for his mother. When he could no longer see the house as a speck, he shivered and his lip trembled, but still he looked bravely into Isidore's eyes.

Isidore had wrapped himself now in the long carpet that had covered the bottom of the skiff, but it was neither closely woven nor of the soft texture to keep him warm, and he could not control his teeth from chattering.

"We'd best lie down, Mr. Charley," he said, as the night drew near. "That will keep the wind off us a bit."

"All right, Isidore."

They took the cushions from all the seats and placed them aft of the middle. Charley lay with his head sheltered from the wind by the high back of the stern seat. A small cushion formed his pillow, his back extended along two more, and his feet came within the arms of Isidore, who crouched down and placed his head against the aft rowing seat and the boat's side.

With this arrangement of their weights, her head rode high and she blew away more quickly. She was a good, steady family boat, twenty-six feet long, and there was no breaking sea to poop her. Occasionally ripples that formed on the big billows splashed and fung drops over the sides near the ballasted stern.

"Aren't you cold, Isidore?"

"I've often been colder than this, Mr. Charley. Don't you mind about me. Keep your head covered, and I'll take care of your feet. Are you getting cold?"

"Not very, Isidore. It's nice to have you hold my feet."

The big boy clutched them tighter.