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CHRISTMAS.

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Hark from the restless street
The whirl and din,
The million hearts that beat
And break therein!
Hark! from the quiet leas,
The streaming dells,
Borne on the frosty breeze
The sound of bells!

Ring out, O Christmas bells!
In music flow,
Wherever sorrow dwells
Or strife or woe.
Proclaim the blessed birth,
That wafts again,
Peace to the troubled earth—
Good will to men!

Nearly two thousand years have passed since the star of the nativity went before the wondering, expectant wise men of the East, and in verification of their traditional interpretation of prophecy, "stood over" the fields of Bethlehem, on that historic plain where centuries before mighty deliverances had been wrought in the name of the "God of the hosts of Israel."

It was the birthplace of David. Here, sling in hand, he had guarded his father's flock; here he had been anointed; and in one of the most touching incidents of his later life, when compelled to flee from the jealous hostility and murderous designs of Saul, it was to these peaceful scenes that his mind instinctively reverted, and he pleaded with his followers: "Oh! that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethelhem that is at the gate!"

These were the fields that have been made "beautiful forever to the imagination, by the charming idyl of David's ancestress, Ruth the Moabitess."

But now a greater than David; He who should bring that spir-

itual deliverance which the Old Testament prophets foretold, had come to earth. And yet not the wise men, nor even Mary, the exultant young mother, could fully interpret these wonderful prophecies, or know that in the ages yet to come millions of men would joyously unite in celebrating the birth of Him who was then cradled in a manger.

And, indeed, it was long after Jesus had lived his beautiful, helpful life, and bravely met his tragic death; long after the fire of Pentecostal day had kindled the flame of the spirit in the breast of His beloved disciples, and they, too, had finished their faithful work on earth and joined their risen Master, that any attempt to celebrate his coming was made.

The actual date of the birth of Jesus Christ was lost to the early Christian church, and was a

subject of much investigation and discussion. Indeed, it was uncertain long after the institution of Christmas, and for two centuries this was one of the most movable of feast days. We say for "two centuries," because we know that it was not until the fourth century that a large body of theologians, who at the instance of Cyril of Jerusalem, had made a searching investigation of the subject, agreed upon the 25th of December as being the date of the nativity; and though the date of the institution of Christmas is not positively known, the best authorities concur in thinking it to have been early in the second century.

There was by no means a unanimous concurrence in this opinion of the early theologians, nor, indeed, has there ever been since; and yet so long has this decision been adhered to that to

us Christmas means the 25th of December, and the 25th of December means Christmas, and any attempt to change it would seem sacriligious.

As some one has beautifully said, "it is a very inconsequential thing to know whether Jesus Christ was actually born on the day we commemorate; it is a wonderful thing that on any one day all Christendom unites to celebrate the glorious birth of the Prince of Peace; that on one day above all others is the Christ-child born in our hearts. And so beautiful has the day grown in the imagination of millions, that it by a revelation from heaven we could know the actual birthday of Jesus to have been months away from it, to the whole world it would always stand as the real Christmas, the holiest of the holy days, the most joyous of holidays."

The old Romans annually celebrated a festival in honor of Saturn, called Saturnalia. This occurred in December, originally during one day, but afterwards lasting seven days. It was a period of unrestrained license and merriment, and the



A CHRISTMAS PUDDING.