

## Children's Department.

## THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

ADVENT is over. Christmas is here. The holy song, chanted by angel voices on the Saviour's birthnight, above the fields of Bethlehem, will find its echo to-day in every region of the earth. It will be sung in state cathedrals, and in quiet village churches, in lowly cottages, and on the wide ocean. Wherever Christ's Name is named, there is Christmas joy to-day. Anthems and carols are sung, churches are dressed with holly and bay, and holy solemnities are kept. Christian homes are decked with green boughs, and Christian families assemble together and rejoice. Every nation has its own way of showing Christmas joy. In England we have happy fireside meetings; our children sing carols, and receive presents; every body has a kind wish for his neighbour: and the rich are accustomed to show their gratitude for the blessings of the day by dispensing gifts to the poor. In northern countries, such as Sweden and Norway, where through the long dreary winters the horses and cattle are kept entirely within doors, a double allowance of food is dispensed to each, that the dumb creatures may share in man's joy. A sheaf of corn, too, is set upon a pole in front of every house, that the little birds may have plenty and rejoice. Throughout Germany a bright Christmas-tree shines in every home, whether palace or cottage, and tells of the Light of the world which lit up the stable at Bethlehem to-day. In India, where even at Christmas the weather is hot, I have been told that nosegays of gorgeous tropical flowers are placed in the churches on the stands for books, one for every worshipper. These pleasant customs are all good, if they are the genuine fruit of Christian joy in the heart: only we must take care, each one for himself, that our joy is Christian, and beware lest in our happiness we forget the great and glorious event from whence it took its rise. After the holy Child was born, and the angels had rejoiced, and the shepherds had worshipped, Mary, we are told, "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." This is what we should strive to do: one little girl I knew who was enabled to do so on the last Christmas day she spent on earth.

Agnes White was born in a small country village towards the south of England, and was sent early to its school. It was a homely, quiet place; its children had none but simple pleasures, and the most prized of them were gathered round Christmas-tide. You shall hear how they spent it. When the Advent Collect gave notice that Christmas was coming, preparations for the carol singing began in the school. First the words were learnt, and then the tunes, all the little hearts being set on the coming festival. School broke up on the 23rd of December; but the elder boys and girls were allowed to bring green boughs and dress up the school-room, while their elders were doing the same thing for the church. Very pleasant they thought it; and when it was over they sung through the carols, and ran home, their mistress telling them to mind and put on plenty of warm things against she saw them again. At seven o'clock they met at her door, glowing with their run in the cold air, the boys muffled up with gay worsted comforters, and the girls in cloaks, or their mothers' shawls. She arranged her little party, and taking the youngest child by the hand, walked with them to Squire Wilmoth's house. They crept before his dining-room windows, and then began their liveliest carol. The shutters were soon thrown back,

and the windows opened. The ladies and gentlemen listened, and thanked them; then they handed biscuits and fruit out of window, and sent them elder wine. Wishing their friends a merry Christmas, the singers hastened away to the parsonage. They were expected there; so the windows were open, and two little heads peeping out of them. The carols over, the singers were brought into the warm room all gay with holly, and were feasted with cake and good things, till they were dismissed each with a Christmas present, the boys to run home, and the girls to keep by their mistress's side, till she dropped them one by one at their mother's door. Such was Christmas Eve! And the festival itself, how delightful it was! There were no lessons at morning school, but Christmas hymns, and texts, and there were pictures of Bethlehem and the holy Child; and the church was so beautiful, and the singing such a pleasure, and then the happy meeting with elder brothers and sisters at home, and the Christmas dinner and merry evening!

Eight of these bright seasons had Agnes White known since at five years old she first went to Hadley School; the ninth found her stretched on a bed of sickness. She had taken cold a few weeks before, inflammation of the lungs had followed, and was plainly bringing her to the grave. You shall hear how she passed her last Christmas on earth. Her kind schoolmistress, Mrs. Best, was unable to go and see her till the afternoon service was over: she then hastened to her bed-side, and found her alone. A print of Bethlehem was pinned to her bed; her Bible, open at the second chapter of St. Luke, was in her hand; and the book-marker, which had dropped from it, bore the words—

"Unto us a child is born."

"A happy Christmas to you, my dear child!" said Mrs. Best. "I could not come sooner to say it; but I'm afraid it's dull for you alone." "Oh, no, mistress, not dull!" answered Agnes, with a smile. "I heard the carol-singing last night: it was a good way off; but I knew the old words, and I said them over till I went to sleep. I could not rest much—I never do now—but I shut my eyes, and then I seemed to see the stable at Bethlehem, and the child Jesus in the manger." "And what then, dear child?" asked Mrs. Best. "Then," said Agnes, in a low voice, "I prayed, 'By the mystery of Thy holy incarnation, by Thy holy nativity, good Lord, deliver us.'" Mrs. Best was silent a little; then she roused herself, and said, "And how has to-day passed, my dear?" "The children brought me their presents to look at to-day; and this one for me," said the little girl, pointing to the picture of Bethlehem. "Look, that is where Jesus Christ was born; and those are the fields where the shepherds watched their flocks by night; I do like to look at it. And mother has read me the lessons, and some of the prayers. Oh, no! it has not been a dull Christmas, though I did fret at first at not getting to church, or not going out carol-singing." "Perhaps," said her kind friend, "you have thought more about Jesus Christ and good things since you've been laid here, than when you were strong and well." Agnes was silent for a minute; then she whispered, "Well, I do." As the good schoolmistress walked home she said to herself, "I doubt that pretty lamb will never see another Christmas in this world. It is a happy thing she has made such good use of this one."

The little girl's death was even nearer than her friends expected,—she did not outlive that Christmas-tide. On New Year's Eve she suddenly broke a blood-vessel, and died before midnight. Her mother bent down, and could just distinguish the words, "Glory to God in the highest." [They were the last she uttered, and in a few minutes all was over.]

After morning prayers on the Feast of Epiphany, the mortal remains of Agnes White were laid to rest in the church-

yard through which she had so often trodden on her way to the house of prayer. A simple stone marks the spot, and is thus inscribed:—"Agnes White, died New Year's Eve, 1881, aged 13 years. 'Glory to God in the highest.'"

## HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

## A CHRISTMAS STORY.

It was a small room with nothing in it but a bed, two chairs, and a big chest. A few little gowns hung on the walls on the wall, and the only picture was the wintry sky, sparkling with stars, framed by the uncurtained window. But the moon, pausing to peep, saw something pretty and heard something pleasant. Two heads in little round night-caps lay on one pillow, two pairs of wide-awake blue eyes stared up at the light, and two tongues were going like mill clappers.

"I'm so glad we got our shirts done in time! It seemed as if we never should, and I don't think six cents is half enough for a great red flannel thing with three button-holes—do you?" said one little voice, rather wearily.

"No; but then we each made four, and fifty cents is a good deal of money. Are you sorry we didn't keep our quarters to ourselves?" asked the other voice, with an undertone of regret in it.

"Yes, I am, till I think how pleased the children will be with our tree, for they don't expect anything, and will be so surprised. I wish we had more toys to put on it, for it looks so small and mean with only three or four things."

"It won't hold any more, so I wouldn't worry about it. The toys are very red and yellow, and I guess the babies won't know how cheap they are, but like them as much as if they cost heaps of money."

This was a cheery voice, and as it spoke the four blue eyes turned toward the chest under the window, and the kind moon did her best to light up the tiny tree standing there. A very pitiful little tree it was—only a branch of hemlock in an old flower-pot, propped up with bits of coal, and hung with a few penny toys earned by the patient fingers of the elder sisters, that the little ones should not be disappointed.

But in spite of the magical moonlight the broken branch, with its scanty supply of fruit, looked pathetically poor, and one pair of eyes filled slowly with tears, while the other pair lost their happy look, as if a cloud had come over the sunshine.

"Are you crying, Dolly?" "Not much, Polly." "What makes you, dear?" "I didn't know how poor we were till I saw the tree, and then I couldn't help it," sobbed the elder sister, for at twelve she already knew some of the cares of poverty, and missed the happiness that seemed to vanish out of all their lives when father died.

"It's dreadful. 'I never thought we'd have to earn our tree, and only be able to get a broken branch after all, with nothing on it but three sticks of candy, two squeaking dogs, a red cow, and an ugly bird with one feather in its tail;'" and overcome by a sudden sense of destitution, Polly sobbed even more despairingly than Dolly.

"Hush, dear; we must cry softly, or mother will hear, and come up, and then we shall have to tell. You know we said we wouldn't seem to mind not having any Christmas, she felt so sorry about it."

"I must cry, but I'll be quiet." So the two heads went under the pillow for a few minutes, and not a sound betrayed them as the little sisters cried softly in one another's arms, lest mother should discover that they were no longer careless children, but brave young creatures trying to bear their share of the burden cheerfully.

When the shower was over the faces came out shining like roses after rain, and the voices went on again as before.

"Don't you really wish there was a Santa Claus, who knew what we wanted,

and would come and put two silver half-dollars in our stockings, so we could go and see *Puss in Boots* at the Museum to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes, indeed; but we didn't hang up any stockings, you know, because mother had nothing to put in them. It does seem as if rich people might think of poor people now and then. Such little bits of things would make us happy, and it couldn't be much trouble to take two small girls to the play, and give them candy now and then."

"I shall when I'm rich, like Mr. Chrome and Miss Kent. I shall go round every Christmas with a big basket of goodies, and give all the poor children some."

"Pr'aps if we sew ever so many flannel shirts we may be rich by-and-by. I should give mother a new bonnet first of all, for I heard Miss Kent say no lady would wear such a shabby one. Mrs. Smith said fine bonnets didn't make real ladies. I like her best, but I do want a locket like Miss Kent's."

"Good-night, Dolly."

"Good-night, Polly."

Two soft kisses were heard, a nestling sound followed, and presently the little sisters lay fast asleep, cheek against cheek, on the pillow wet with their tears, never dreaming what was going to happen to them to-morrow.

Now Miss Kent's room was next to theirs, and as she sat sewing she could hear the children's talk, for they soon forgot to whisper. At first she smiled, then she looked sober, and when the prattle ceased she said to herself, as she glanced about her pleasant chamber:

"Poor little things! they think I'm rich, and envy me, when I'm only a milliner earning my living. I ought to have taken more notice of them, for their mother has a hard time, I fancy, but never complains. I'm sorry they heard what I said, and if I knew how to do it without offending her, I'd trim a nice bonnet for a Christmas gift, for she is a lady, in spite of her old clothes. I can give the children some of the things they want anyhow, and I will. The idea of those mites making a fortune out of shirts at six cents apiece!"

Miss Kent laughed at the innocent delusion, but sympathized with her little neighbours, for she knew all about hard times. She had good wages now, but spent them on herself, and liked to be fine rather than neat. Still, she was a good-hearted girl, and what she had overheard set her to thinking soberly, then to acting kindly, as we shall see.

"If I had n't spent all my money on my dress for the party to-morrow night, I'd give each of them a half-dollar. As I can not, I'll hunt up the other things they wanted, for it's a shame they shouldn't have a bit of Christmas, when they tried so hard to please the little ones."

As she spoke she stirred about her room, and soon had a white apron, an old carnelian heart on a fresh blue ribbon, and two papers of bonbons ready. As no stockings were hung up, she laid a clean towel on the floor before the door, and spread forth the small gifts to look their best.

Miss Kent was so busy that she did not hear a step come quietly up stairs, and Mr. Chrome, the artist, peeped at her through the balusters, wondering what she was about. He soon saw, and watched her with pleasure, thinking she never looked prettier than now.

Presently she caught him at it, and hastened to explain, telling what she had heard, and how she was trying to atone for her past neglect of these young neighbours. Then she said good-night, and both went to their rooms, she to sleep happily, and he to smoke as usual.

But his eye kept turning to some of the "nice little bundles" that lay on his table, as if the story he had heard suggested how he might follow Miss Kent's example. I rather think he would not have disturbed himself if he had not heard the story told in such a soft voice, with a pair of bright eyes full of pity