

CHRISTMAS.

WRAPPED in a mantle of fleecy snow,  
With jewels of icicles hanging low,  
And flashing on beard and hair,  
Old Christmas comes.

The dear old fellow, in regal state,  
As king of the people (who all await  
His coming with loyal joy),  
Is near us now.

His heralds approach—frost, wind, and snow,  
And quickly over the country they go,  
Proclaiming the old king near;  
And all are glad.

The rapid rivers, and bays, and lakes,  
Are bridges now, for His Majesty makes  
Even water own his sway,  
Reluctantly.

But does he come empty-handed? No!  
All over the land, wherever you go,  
His bounty is felt by all,  
Both rich and poor.

The rich, in their spacious and lofty halls;  
The poor, in their homes, where joy seldom calls.  
Are blessed with one happiness  
At Christmas-tide.

For poor the home, far poorer the heart,  
To which old King Christmas does not impart  
Some pleasures unknown before,  
Some Christmas joys.

Friends gladly gather from far and near,  
In the dear old homesteads, where hearty cheer  
And loving greetings from all,  
Tell Christmas is here.

The hand is pressed with a warmer clasp,  
And the dark frown falls, like an ugly mask,  
From the place it has clouded  
Alas, too long!

Foes become friends at this Christmas-tide;  
For all over the land, both far and wide,  
Sounds the grandest old chorus  
Of "Peace on Earth,


Good will toward men," 'mid the world's din,  
Rings the song down the ages, bringing in  
The Christ through whom we have them,  
And Christmas-time.

M. R. B.

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HELEN'S CHRISTMAS QUESTION.

BY B. B.



It is Christmas Eve, and the quiet country, with the silvery moon and myriad stars above, is so cold, so bright, so still, that one can almost imagine it bears, like the shepherds of old on the birthnight of our Lord, the angel hosts of heaven proclaiming "Good tidings of great joy, for unto you is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." How different the feelings and the scene in the noisy, bustling city, with its streets ablaze with light, and filled with eager hurrying throngs, some merely gazing at the wonders so temptingly displayed in the gorgeous show windows; others attempting, half-distracted by the noise, to choose the last gifts for the little stockings, already

hanging at the home fireside for Santa Claus! What a mystery seems to pervade the very air on Christmas Eve, and how much it increases the enjoyment of the "merrie time!" Half the pleasure of the little folks consists in wondering what Santa Claus will bring. And "grown-up children," too, spend more time in wondering than they are willing to admit, and think they have learned to hide it under an assumed air of indifference which they imagine says as plainly as words, "we don't expect anything," though what long faces they would wear if the morrow brought for them no tokens of love and remembrance! In a beautiful room, made bright and charming with all that wealth directed by cultured and refined taste can procure, sits, more lovely than them all, a bappy mother, surrounded by her family, except the father and eldest son, who have not yet come in.

By a table sit Kate and Maud, two bright girls,

"Standing with reluctant feet  
Where the brook and river meet,  
Womanhood and childhood meet."

They are busily engaged in taking the last stitches, one in a dressing-gown for father, the other in a pair of richly embroidered slippers for brother Will. The last is a rising young lawyer and the pride of the family. On the floor behind the girls sit two ruddy boys of twelve and fourteen years, giving the finishing touches to a pair of brackets made by their own skillful fingers, and designed as a grand surprise to the fondly-loved mother. The boys, like the girls, are taught that a gift is prized, not for its intrinsic value, but as evidence of their skill and industry as well as affection. Ever and anon they peep furtively from their improvised hiding-place to see if "mother is watching." No; mother has learned long since that at times she must be both blind and deaf, and never betray that she sees the consternation caused by her unexpected entrance, or notices the work shoved hurriedly away, and a book hastily substituted, and studiously perused upside down. Nor was she thrown off her guard, even on that dreadful day when little May upset Kate's basket, and displayed an exquisite lilac shawl nearly completed, but suddenly saw a marvellous dog across the street, and drew both boys to her side by her amusing comments, though they could see nothing unusual in the canine specimen. But to-night she is really and truly deaf and blind to their proceedings, so deeply is she absorbed in telling the "old, old story" of Jesus' birth, and finding by the shepherds and wise men, to Baby May, who sits on her lap, listening with deepest attention to the glowing words in which she describes the shepherds, the dear little white lambs, the wondrously brilliant star, the angel voices, and, above all, the little chubby, dimpled, darling baby on the golden straw in the manger, among the huge horned oxen. Helen, a thoughtful girl of nine, listens with wide-open eyes, as deeply interested as Baby May, for it is a story that never loses its charm. But there is the opening door, and in come father and Will just one moment too soon for the busy workers by the lamp, and under the table go dressing-gown and slippers, with just one more stitch to be put in each. Kate tosses her sunny curls, and says, "Why didn't they stay away five minutes longer?" But thoughtful Maud says, "We ought to have finished

them this morning." For a while all is mirth, merriment, and noise, but Baby May soon grows weary, and, climbing again into mother's lap, begs to be told "just one time more" the story of the "wee, wee baby, and the great big oxen." All listen while the mother tells again the story to the lovely child, until at last the blue eyes close, and Baby May sleeps the happy dreamless slumber of innocent childhood. A silence falls around, which is broken by the thoughtful Helen, who says, "Mamma, I don't understand how Christmas can be Christ's birthday."

"Why not, my child?"  
"Because, when my birthday comes, I have all the presents, and no one else has any, and on your birthday you have the gifts, and it is the same on father's and the girls' and boys', but now every body else has presents except Jesus, and still you say it is his birthday. Have you got any presents ready for Him?"

The boys laugh and say, "That is just like Helen, always asking odd questions. I'd like to know how anybody can give Jesus a present!"

But with tears in her eyes, the gentle mother says: "My dear little Helen, you are right. I fear we have all lavished more time and thought on gifts for each other than on those for our dear Lord Jesus, who gave even his own life for us. Each one of us should give his heart anew to Jesus on his birthday morn, resolving to seek and love him more than ever, and serve him henceforth with all our souls."

Laying his hand tenderly on Helen's fair head, her father said, "I thank you, my child, for reminding us of our duty. Truly, 'out of the mouths of babes come words of wisdom.' Let us strive to make our hearts an acceptable offering by overcoming our besetting sins, and using the 'talents' committed to our keeping in his holy service. There is also another way of giving a birthday gift to our dear Jesus. Do you not remember his words, 'The poor you have always with you.' 'He that giveth to one, the least of these, giveth to me also.'"

On the hearts of all present little Helen's childlike questions sank deeply, but on none more than on the beloved eldest son, the pride and hope of all the family. Only that day had a poor desolate widow, once the spoiled child of fortune, now on the verge of starvation, came to him with a most piteous tale of worry, and besought him, for the sake of right, to aid her in rescuing the little all of her fatherless children from wicked men. But he had turned a deaf ear to her pleading, reasoning that it would be very troublesome, would offend some high in power, and could not possibly benefit him. To another temptation was he also gradually yielding, unsuspected by his proud, loving parents, but fast gaining strength on his noble, genial nature.

Hitherto had he trusted in his own strength, reasoning that he must not bring distress and disgrace on his fond family, that he must do nothing to sully his noble name and lose his high place in the world's esteem: but now he determined to give himself wholly to Jesus as a birthday gift, and humbly as a little child implore him to give him aid to resist evil in spite of all temptation, and courage to do right in his sight, though he should thereby incur the frown of the whole world.

The practical effect of Helen's question with him was shown in the note sent the sorrowing widow that he would do all in his power to obtain justice for her, and in the decided no uttered to all tempting friends.

Timely and appropriate gifts from the father and mother made many a desolate and poverty-stricken home bright and happy, and the girls were like ministering angels of mercy to more than one scene of sorrow and suffering. The little boys began by dividing their Christmas marbles and toys with the poor boys of the streets; and, never forgetting to prepare their hearts anew each year for a Christmas offering to the Saviour they so dearly loved, they grew to be great and good men, making the world better and holier by their noble lives.

Thus was a simple question from childish lips the source of endless good, and seemed indeed the word in season, like apples of gold in pictures of silver. To you I repeat little Helen's question, "Have you a birthday gift for Jesus!"

THE FOUR CALLS.

THE Spirit came in childhood,  
And pleaded, "Let me in;"  
But, ah! the door was bolted  
And barred by childish sin.  
The child said, "I'm too little;  
There's time enough; to-day  
I can not open." Sadly  
The Spirit went his way.

Again he came and pleaded  
In youth's bright happy hour.  
He called, but heard no answer;  
For, fettered in sin's power,  
The youth lay dreaming idly,  
And crying "Not to-day,  
For I must have some pleasure  
Again he turned away.

Again he came in mercy,  
In manhood's vigorous prime,  
But still could find no welcome;  
The merchant had "no time"  
To spare for true repentance,  
No time to praise and pray;  
And thus repulsed and saddened,  
The Spirit turned away.

Once more he called and waited.  
The man was old and sad;  
He scarcely heard the whisper—  
His heart was scared and bad.  
"Go! leave me. When I need thee  
I'll call for thee," he cried;  
Then, sinking on his pillow,  
Without a God he died!

GIBSON, the sculptor, described Queen Victoria as extremely affable, and even deigning to laugh heartily at some of his stories. One day he said to her, "Madam, I was a thief," "A thief," Mr. Gibson!" "Yes, madam; for when a child I stole an apple from the stall of an old woman with a wooden leg. My mother found me out, took me back to the old woman, and begged her to beat me with her crutch, which she did lustily. I never stole any more." "Ah!" replied her Majesty, "a great deal of sorrow was brought into the world by the apple."

SOME CHRISTMAS GEMS.

"As fits the holy Christmas birth,  
Be this, good friends, our carol still—  
Be peace on earth, be peace on earth,  
To men of gentle will."—*Thackeray.*

"Sound over all waters, reach out from  
all lands,  
The chorus of voices, the clasping of  
hands;  
Sing hymns that were sung by the stars  
of the morn,  
Sing songs of the angels when Jesus was  
born."—*Whittier.*