

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF.

BY PHOEBE CARY.

[In Norway it is a very pretty custom to erect on a pole a well filled sheaf of grain at Christmas time, that the birds may have their Christmas feast as well as the boys and girls. Our picture shows the queer store-house in which the grain is kept, and to the left the odd snow-shoes or skees on which the boys slide down-hill with great skill. In the following poem Miss Phoebe Cary describes the birds' Christmas and the prodigal's home coming.—Ed.]

"Now, good-wife, bring your precious hoard,"
The Norland farmer cried,
"And heap the hearth, and heap the board,
For the blessed Christmastide.

"And bid the children fetch," he said
"The last ripe sheaf of wheat,
And set it on the roof o'erhead
That the birds may come and eat.

"And this we do for His dear sake,
The Master kind and good,
Who of the loaves he blest and brake
Fed all the multitude."

Then Fredrica, and Franz, and Paul,
When they heard their father's words,
Put up the sheaf, and one and all
Seemed merry as the birds.

Till suddenly the maiden sighed,
The boys were hushed in fear,
As, covering all her face, she cried,
"If Hansel were but here!"

And when at dark, about the hearth
They gathered still and slow,
You heard no more the childish mirth
So loud an hour ago.

And on their tender cheeks the tears
Shone in the flickering light;
For they were four in other years
Who are but three to-night.

And tears are in the mother's tone;
As she speaks she trembles too:
"Come, children, come, the supper's done,
And your father waits for you."

Then Fredrica, and Franz, and Paul,
Stood each beside his chair;
The boys were comely lads and tall,
The girl was good and fair.

The father's hand was raised to crave
A grace before the meat,
When the daughter spake—her words
were brave,
But her voice was low and sweet:

"Dear father, should we give the wheat
To all the birds of the air?
Shall we let the kite and the raven eat
Such choice and dainty fare?"

"For if to-morrow from our store
We drive them not away,
The good little birds will get no more
Than the evil birds of prey."

"Nay, nay, my child, he gravely said,
"You have spoken to your shame,
For the good, good Father overhead,
Feeds all the birds the same.

"He hears the ravens when they cry,
He keeps the fowls of the air;
And a single sparrow cannot lie
On the ground without his care."

"Yea, father, yea; and tell me this"—
Her words came fast and wild—
"Are not a thousand sparrows less
To him than a single child?"

"Even though it sinned and strayed from
home?"
The father groaned in pain
As she cried, "Oh, let our Hansel come
And live with us again!"

"I know he did what was not right."
Sadly he shook his head.

She stops; the portal open flies;
Her fear is turned to joy.
"Hansel!" the startled father cries;
And the mother sobs, "My boy!"

'Tis a bowed and humbled man they greet.
With loving lips and eyes,
Who fain would kneel at his father's
feet,
But he softly bids him rise;

And he says, "I bless thee, O mine own;

Of the Child that was born at Christmas-
tide
In Bethlehem of old.

And all the hours glide swift away
With loving, hopeful words,
Till the Christmas sheaf at the break of
day
Is alive with happy birds!

GOD LOVES YOU.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is beyond comprehension how God can love us when we do so much that is displeasing to him, but we are told in his Word that he does love us.

There is not one of his creatures in this wide world that he does not love, no, not one. No matter how far gone in sin one may be, he loves him and yearns after him, that he may return to him, and that his sins may be washed away in the blood of Jesus. But God does not love sin; he hates it; it is the only thing in this world he hates. He says it is an abomination to him. Still, while he hates sin, God loves the sinner; he pities him and longs for him to come and be forgiven. He is "not willing any should perish," and if he sees one coming even a great way off, who has turned to him for forgiveness, he will haste to meet him and embrace him as a father his penitent son.

And now, will you not come and accept God's mercy in Jesus Christ? When you think how long you have kept your heart from yielding to his wonderful love, do you not feel sorry that you have grieved his heart of love by rejecting his offers of mercy and forgiveness?

Why does God so much desire your happiness? It is because he loves you and wants to save you from the results of your chosen sins and neglect, which he does at a great price, even with the precious blood of Jesus. He has provided a free salvation. He offers it to you freely; you cannot buy it; it is beyond price, but it may be yours by simply accepting it. Can greater love be imagined than this, by which he gives forgiveness to you, when you have so long neglected him and his offers of mercy and blessings?

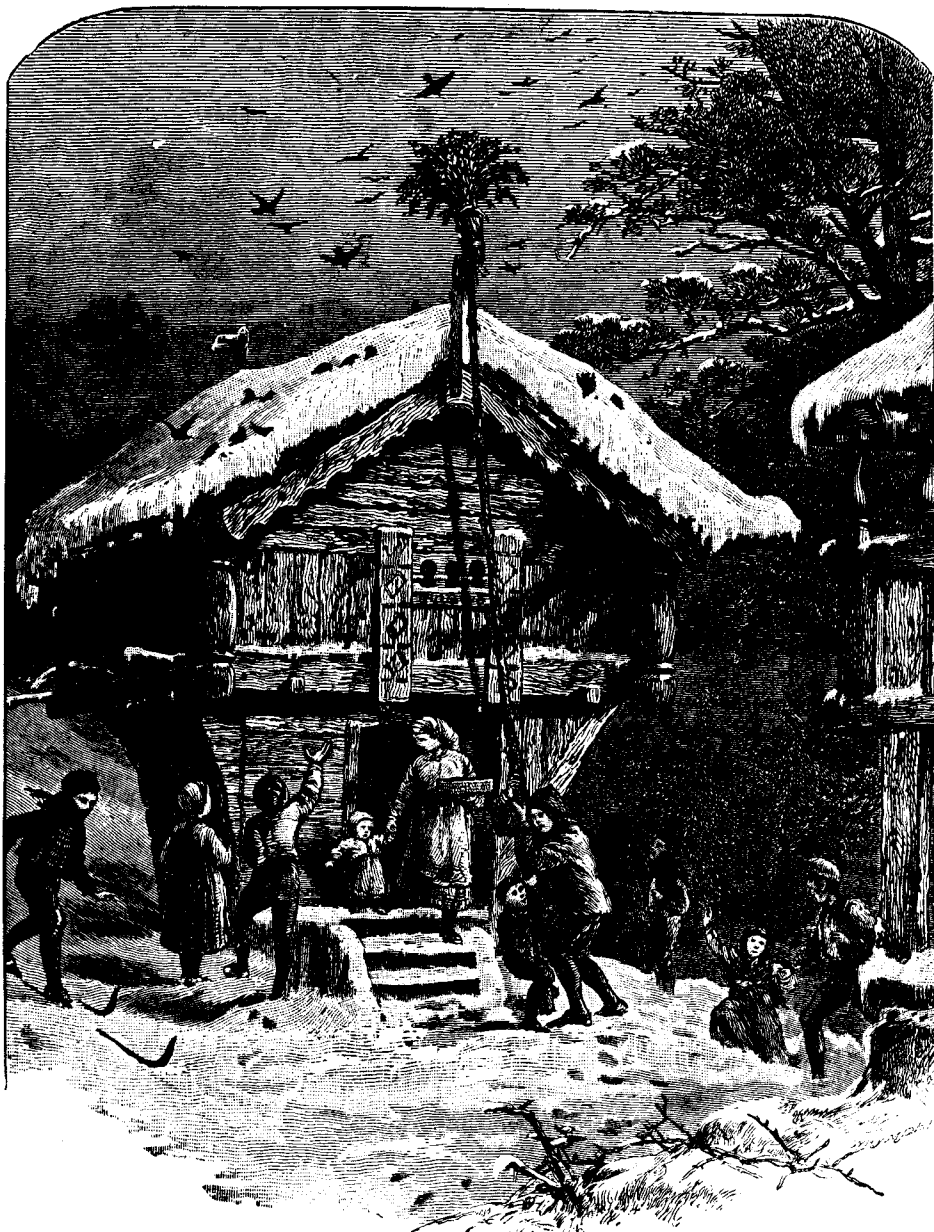
Neglect! Neglect! What a word! How much in it! Think! You need not commit open sins to have the wages of sin. Neglect to comply with God's command to walk in his way, and the result is, the sure judgment upon sin will follow.

Oh, do not neglect the tender invitation of your loving Heavenly Father, but come to him and be saved, for Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will no wise cast out."

Do not put it off, but come now. If you wait until some other time, you may never come at all. Ask him to receive you just as you are, and you have his word for it, that your "sins and your iniquities will I remember no more." What a gracious promise! How wonderful! But give yourself entirely to him and he will forgive, receive and love you as his own child forever and ever.

Come! Come! Come!

LEARN to explain thy doctrine by thy life



THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF.

"If he knew I longed for him to-night,
He would not come," he said,

"He went from me in wrath and pride;
God! shield him tenderly!
For I hear the wild wind cry outside
Like a soul in agony!"

"Nay, it is a soul!" oh, eagerly,
The maiden answered then;
"And father, what if it should be he,
Come back to us again!"

Yea, and thou shalt be blest!"
While the happy mother holds her son
Like a baby on her breast.

Their house and love again to share
The Prodigal has come;
And now there will be no empty chair,
Nor empty heart in their home.

And they think, as they see their joy and
pride
Safe back in the sheltering fold,