

For the EDUCATIONAL REVIEW.]

Christmas Talks and Stories.

BY MRS. S. B. PATTERSON.

December brings to children the all-absorbing thought of Christmas. Whenever the subject is mentioned they are eager to tell what they got last Christmas, and what they want this year, etc. But from this babel of voices there comes little evidence of any knowledge or thought as to the real meaning of Christmas-time. What does Christmas mean? Why do we hear so much about gifts just now? From time to time during the month there should be special reference to the season, sometimes by a story, at other times by a song, or a chat, or a recitation given the children to learn. In this way, by a carefully planned scheme, the true idea of the meaning of Christmas may be developed, and a spirit of giving and of sharing good things aroused, instead of the mere desire to get.

Birthdays,—we all enjoy having our friends remember us on our birthday, even if merely to wish us many happy returns. We give presents to show our love on a person's birthday. How many children have a baby brother or sister? That baby was a present from God to the people in that home. They are to keep it and love it, and as each year its birthday comes round, they may give it some present to show their love.

We keep as holidays the birthdays of some people whom we have not seen, such as King Edward's birthday, and also the twenty-fourth of May, in memory of our good Queen Victoria. They, too, were once tiny babies whom God sent into the world to grow up and do work for Him.

But the most precious baby whom God ever gave this world was Jesus. And we like to think of Christmas as His birthday. Tell the story of the shepherds watching their sheep that night near Bethlehem, how, perhaps, they took turns staying awake to see that no bear or robber came stealing through the darkness to hurt the sheep. Then, suddenly, the strange light shone around them,—a soft, bright light that came from neither sun nor moon nor candle; more beautiful than any of these, for it shone right down from heaven as the angel came through to bring the gladness to the earth. Describe the shepherds' fear, passing away as they heard the good tidings, and tell of the song of the angels after the news was heard. Then, as they went back into heaven, and the light grew softer, the shepherds looked at each other in wonder, and said, "Let us go quickly into Bethlehem and see for ourselves the child the angel has been telling us about." Describe

their haste, and their happiness in finding the infant Jesus. In what kind of a cradle did they find Him?

At some other time tell the story of the wise men from the East, who came with their rich gifts to worship the wonderful child. Picture to the children the long, slow journey across the desert; no steam-cars or electric railways, not even a carriage-road, and no horse could travel over that desert of sand. How did they travel? Have the children ever seen a camel, or a picture of one? Why is it better than a horse for such a journey?

Describe their visit to Herod, as they went to him to enquire whereabouts in his country the child was to be found. Tell of his pretended pleasure, asking them to be sure to come back to tell him, so that he could go and see the baby too, while all the time his heart was full of fear and hatred and evil plans. The wise men need not have gone to him at all, for the beautiful star guided them right to the house where the infant Jesus was.

What rich presents they brought! Gold and costly perfumes! How the whole house would be filled with the odour of frankincense! Then, before the wise men left Bethlehem, God sent them a message—they were not to return to the King, but to go quietly home by some other way. They thought Herod was true, but God knew what evil thoughts were in his heart.

After telling a story to little children, it is well, occasionally, to let them draw pictures illustrating the story. The results of such work are, of course, very crude; but the occupation is a good one, exercising the memory, arousing imagination, and giving room for originality.

A chat about Christmas Trees may be made both interesting and instructive. Apart from the subject of gifts, there is the tree itself, which is generally very little thought of by the children, but which has probably been selected with some care, its size, proportion, and symmetry having been carefully considered in the choice. Where did the tree grow? What kind of a tree is it? Why would not a maple do as well? Or an elm? Have a number of trees pointed out and named whose leaves turned red, yellow, or brown in the autumn and then fell off, leaving the branches bare. Have these trees lost all their beauty? Notice the outline of the branches and twigs against a clear winter sky, also the general character of the outline of trees of different kinds, the drooping of the elm and the firm, decided uprightness of the maple. See the birds' nests which were hidden all summer among the leaves! Yet, these trees, even with all their charm, would not suit us for Christmas. Have a few short talks about evergreen trees, having specimen branches brought, on different days, of spruce, fir,