

"LITTLE PAUL'S CHRISTMAS."

A BEAUTIFUL sunset stained the western sky—gold and crimson and scarlet—such soft gold and rich crimson and bright scarlet! It would have been a pleasant spot from which to watch the sun set on a summer evening, that gently sloping hillside, with a silvery brook at the foot, green fields stretching away until they seemed to meet the sky at the west; and the forest at the back with shady paths leading away into its leafy depths. Pleasant indeed, with the fragrant breath of wild flowers scenting the air, and the murmur and sigh of the breeze as it fluttered the leaves, the dreaming hum and buzz of insects, sweet bird notes, and the tinkle, gurgle and splash of the bright waters of the little brook, blending together like an evening hymn of praise.

But it was very different one cold December evening. The wind wailed as it swept through the forest, tossing the bare boughs of the trees and whirling the dead rustling leaves over the frozen ground. The birds had long since flown away; the flowers withered at the chill breath of the frost; the little stream was bound fast with icy fetters, and the brown fields looked dreary indeed.

Little Paul stood watching the sunset while he rested, with the faggots he had gathered in the forest lying at his feet. He shivered as the keen wintry wind found its way through his scanty clothing, but he kept his great dark eyes fixed on the western glory. His hands were red with cold and hardened with toil, though he was so small. Only a tiny boy was he, but looking in the pale patient face you would know he was walking hand in hand with sorrow, and learning her lessons, sad yet sweet.

Since the day they laid his mother beside the father, who died before he was born, no grave had been made in the little church yard but Paul's tears had watered it, as they fell in sympathy for the hearts sad as his own. He fared hard, and so learned to pity others; and his scanty crusts often found their way to those he thought more needy than himself. He had little rest, and was often weary; day by day his step was lighter and his voice softer as he passed the cradle of the sleeping babe, and he was quicker with his help when tired Bertha stooped to lift some heavy burden, and he learned to watch for Jacob's coming home at night, and drag the great arm-chair to the cool porch in summer, and nearer the bright fire in the winter. There was a sharp pain in his side now and then, and he did not feel quite strong, so he never came home from gathering wood in the forest without a bunch of delicate woodland flowers or a few wild strawberries, red and ripe, and, when flowers and berries were all gone, bright pebbles, gay autumn leaves, or handfuls of nuts, for poor crippled Mary; he was no stranger to unkind words, and even blows—so he grew more tender to every living thing. They did not mean to be unkind—Bertha and Jacob—but there were many little mouths to be filled and many little bodies to be clothed, and they had let earthly toil and care so fill their lives that they seldom thought of God, of the dear Mother Mary and of her Divine Son, except for a little while on Sunday at Mass.

You may be sure that although Little Paul's face grew thin, and his cheeks were not rosy like yours,—except now and then a red spot when he was tired or his cough hurt him,—he was none the less fair. The pale patient lips opened only for words of prayer and kindness, the sad eyes looked only love and pity and forgiveness, the red rough hands were always busy with willing service, and his heart was so full of all good thoughts, evil could find no place to enter. Ah! if Bertha and Jacob could have seen him as his Guardian Angel saw him, they would have known how beautiful the little orphan boy was growing. His young, pure heart was always beating to holy, grateful thoughts. He was so often alone, poor boy, and so innocent, that his mind was full of thoughts which his mother had placed there by her pious talk to him of Jesus and Mary and the angels.

Little Paul looked long at the sunset, then drew from his bosom a picture of the dear child Christ Jesus in the arms of His beautiful Mother: he pressed it to his heart and lips, and thought as he looked lovingly at it: "How beautiful they are!" Dear, good Father John gave it to me the day he died, when Bertha let me go to his cottage with the blue violets I had gathered for the altar of the Blessed Virgin. Dear, good Father John! he talked to me so long that evening of the dear Child Jesus, and how he loved us, and came on earth, and died for us. He gave me this picture and my rose-

bush, and told me the first flower that bloomed I must give to the dear little Child Jesus. When he had given me his blessing, he stood a long time looking at the sky where it was all red, as it is now; his lips moved as if he was praying, but he didn't say a word; and his eyes were full of tears. I should have thought he was sad, only he looked happy too,—and so holy, like the pictures of the Saints in the Church. I wonder why Bertha and Jacob never talk to me about the dear Jesus, the Blessed Virgin and heaven. It must be because they are poor and have to work so hard; they have no time. If I should go away, there would be one less to work for, and perhaps they would have time to think of Our Dear Lord. I wonder if I could go! My mother used to talk to me of heaven and its beautiful gate; it was so long ago I almost forget what it was like, but that must be the gate over there—all that red and gold; God lets us see it a little while that we may not miss the way. How good He is!

"To-morrow will be Christmas, and my rose will blossom for the first time. I thought to take it to the priest, and ask him to put it by the crib of the dear little Child Jesus; but I will take it to-night, and go and knock at the beautiful gate; I will lay my rose at the feet of Jesus, I will tell Him I am a poor little boy, and have nothing else to give Him, but that I love Him so well I could not stay away any longer, and beg Him to let me live with Him forever." Busy with these thoughts he picked up the faggots and hurried home.

There was no one in the little kitchen when he entered, and he laid the faggots down on the hearth, carefully placing on one side the fragrant boughs of evergreen he had gathered to make the bare room look a little like Christmas; he smiled as he looked around, and saw the fat goose all ready for roasting on the morrow, and thought that the hungry children, who so seldom had a good dinner, would have his share too. Then as he went to his rose and gently broke the stem, his busy little mind was still full of loving, grateful thoughts. "Bertha loved good Father John, and she has been so kind she always gives my rose the warmest corner of the hearth at night for fear the frost will hurt it. I will only take the flowers; the bush will blossom again for her."

He placed the half opened buds carefully under his poor torn jacket, and stole softly out. At the gate he paused, and taking out his little picture, said to himself: "I shall not need it in heaven; I shall see the dear Child Jesus and the Blessed Virgin all the time; and poor sick Mary always smiles in her dreaming if she falls asleep with her cheek resting on it; I will leave it with her." So he went back, and giving a last loving look at the beautiful little picture, he pressed it to his lips, and laid it on the pillow of the sleeping girl, with a murmured prayer.

Little Paul walked on and on over the lonely road; the sunset radiance grew dim, then faded quite away, but he did not pause; he walked on steadily, praying: "Dear Blessed Virgin, please send my Guardian Angel to hold my hand fast, and lead me to the beautiful gate." The snowflakes commenced to fall, slowly at first, then faster and faster, until road and tree and rock were all alike covered with a mantle of pure white. The little feet moved slower and slower now;—at last they could go no farther.

Little Paul sank down by the side of a snow-covered rock. "I did not think it was so far; I'm tired, and so sleepy. I'll say my prayers, and when it is morning I will go on to the Beautiful Gate." He said the prayers he had learned at his mother's knee,—“Our Father,” and “Hail Mary,” “Acts of Contrition, Faith, Hope and Charity; and all the time the sweet voice grew fainter, and the words dropped slower and slower from the cold, white lips.

As he ceased it seemed to him that he heard his name, “Paul, little Paul,” so clear, so sweet, sweeter than the music in the church on Sunday. He lifted his heavy eyes, and a love of rapture broke over the pale sad face, softer and brighter than the dawn of a May-day morning; a heavenly glory shone all around; white-robed forms with glittering crowns on their brows, and golden harps in their hands, nearer their tender face beaming with love. Some that he knew,—his mother, good Father John. Little Paul felt them near; he did not see them—for bending over him were the faces of his picture, only lovelier, lovelier than he had ever even dreamed. Little Paul drew forth his rose-buds, and as he laid them reverently at the feet of the Child Jesus, they burst into glorious blossoms; louder and clearer swelled the sweet notes of the glad song of welcome; the Child Jesus lifted the roses, and placed on little Paul's brow a crown of

softly shining stars, and the Blessed Virgin laid on his breast a lily.

Next morning they found the body of little Paul cold and pale, with a smile of holy joy upon his lips. Tenderly they lifted the form, and on his breast, untouched by frost, bloomed a lily, purer, whiter and sweeter than any earthly flower.

PUREST OF THE PURE.

I.

PURE as the snows, we say. Ah! never flake
Fell through the brooding air
One-tenth as fair
As Mary's soul was made for Christ's dear sake,
Virgin Immaculate!
The whitest whiteness of the Alpine snows
Beside thy stainless spirit dusky grows.

II.

Pure as the stars! Ah! never lovely night
Wore in its diadem
So pure a gem
As that which fills the ages with its light,
Virgin Immaculate!
The peerless splendors of thy soul by far
Outshine the glow of heaven's clearest star.

III.

Pure as the lilies! Dearest Queen forgive
The fond but feeble trope—
Mother of hope,
Fair love and holy fear! there does not live,
Virgin Immaculate!
In all the grassy haunts where lilies blow,
As white, as rare, as sweet a flower as thou!

IV.

Pure as the breath of God! O, clean of heart!
These happy words can tell
The miracle
Of how divinely innocent thou art,
Virgin Immaculate!
Under thy shining cloak our vileness hide,
Lest her own kindred should disgrace the Bride.

"IF A BODY MEET A BODY."

If a feller catch a feller carrying off his wood,
should a feller whale a feller if a feller could?—
Germantown Emporium.

If a body catch a body stealing his old rye,
should a body kick a body till a body cry?—
Cincinnati Inquirer.

If a body spy a body creeping round his lot,
should a body treat a body to a load of shot?—
Norwich News.

If a body catch a body stealing his Express,
shouldn't a body seize a body and try to get
redress?—Petersburg Express.

If a body wants a body his store to patronize,
shouldn't a body pay a body money to advertise?—
Lynchburg Express.

If a body see a body appropriate his hat,
should a body kick a body just for doing that?—
Star.

If a body catch a body stealing of his chickens,
should a body lick a body like the very dickens?—
Conter Democrat.

If a body catch a body stealing all his corn,
should a body make a body wish he wasn't
born?—Janesboro' Gazette.

If a body spy a body "toting" off his goose,
should a body flog a body like the very deuce?—
Mount Vernon Star.

If a body ask a body to take the country
news, should a body to a body say, "I beg you'll
me excuse?"—Home Journal.

If a body catch a body stealing his umbrella,
should a body smash a body on a body's smeller?—
Southern Recorder.

If a body catch a body playing of his wit,
should a body tell a body he had better quit?—
Advocate.

The London Society Times tells a story of a certain old clergyman who did not exactly hit it off with his congregation, and so at last applied for and received the appointment of "chaplain to a large penitentiary." He preached a farewell sermon, not a word of which could any one object to, except the singularly inappropriate text, which gave great offense. It was: "I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am ye may be also."