

Christmas Hymn.

BY MRS W. FAWCETT.

HARK ! 'tis the song of angels,
How sweet the heavenly strains !
With joy the shepherds listen
On old Judea's plains.
The blissful tidings ringing
Wake up each hill and glen ;
"To God be highest glory,
Peace and good-will to men."

Come bow in adoration
At Bethlehem's lowly shrine,
And our glad homage render
To the Christ-child divine ;
Who laid aside his glory,
Who left his throne above,
Moved by divine compassion,
Led by redeeming love.

Then join the angels' chorus,
Proclaim the Saviour's birth,
Glory to God forever !
Jesus has come to earth.
Lay your best gifts before him,
Your heart's devotion bring :
Hail him with hallelujahs,
Our Saviour and our King !

the echo and perpetuation of that glorious song of old—

"From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold."

An ancient superstition, touching the popular belief, finds expression in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long :
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad ;
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

Superstition vanishes with the fuller manifestation of the Light of the world. But the words of the great dramatist, put in the mouth of Marcellus, are the incarnation of a noble and beautiful idea. The passage has in it the very poetry of Christmas. Such a subject lends itself readily to the imagination. But, all the same, we recognize the element of substantial fact. The morning awakes with music. *Christmas is in the air.* It is everywhere visible in the kindly spirit and beneficent ministries of the season. A feeling of brotherhood is diffused. Peace and goodwill prevail. To all classes, Christmas comes as a benediction.

The precise time of the Saviour's birth has never been accurately ascertained. It varied among the early Oriental churches. By some, the time for celebrating the fact of the Incarnation was set in May, and by others in later months. An inquiry was instituted on the question in the fourth century. It resulted in the settlement of December 25th—a substitute for the ancient Roman *Saturnalia*—as the proper time for the observance of this great festival of the Christian Church.

The exact date of the Advent is not, however, a matter of serious concern. We know that the period was one to which all lines of expectation converged. There was a marvellous coincidence and correspondence of providential and prophetic preparations. It was the fulness of time. Legend and myth had given place to historic certainty. Prophecy awaited fulfilment. There was a sense of deep-felt need. Morally and spiritually, humanity was at its worst. The world by wisdom knew not God. But God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Jesus came to save. The manger was lowly enough, but the glory of the Incarnation was divinely attested. Angels left their thrones of light to chant on earth their heavenly song. The star of Bethlehem was seen in the east. Wise men made a long pilgrimage across the great Syrian desert, to render homage to the new-born king. "And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Then, let Christmas have its due celebration; not after the fashion and forms of mediæval times, but in spirit and manner which befit the purer and more intelligent Christianity of this favoured nineteenth century. Let the bells ring out their merry



THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.

Christmas peals; the churches be opened for service; the choirs select their most stirring anthems; and the wondrous story of Bethlehem be told over and over again.

Let homes be brightened with evergreen decoration; the Christmas-tree brought in for the children; Santa Claus cordially welcomed; family reunions formed; and the customary compliments and gifts of the season be freely exchanged. Send back from earth to heaven the echo of the angel's song, "Good will to men." The poor ye have always with you. There is still a place for offerings of devotion. THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.—*Wesleyan.*

A Better Christmas.

CHRISTMAS is changing for the better. A new spirit is being infused into it. It is not a day of such thoughtless jollity as it used to be. It is as cheery as ever, but more thoughtful. It is becoming a holy day as well as a holiday. Among the children, Christ has come to have a place in it along with Santa Claus or St. Nicholas. It seems not unlikely that, in time, the Babe of Bethlehem will more than rival the elf stocking-filler in their thoughts, or displace him altogether. The time was when the chimney sprite had full possession. And that was a time when the minds of the children were taken up entirely with receiving. Now they are getting to be equally occupied with giving.

In the Christmas of the past there was a deal of selfishness; in the Christmas of the present there is the better delight of making others happy.

In the Christmas of the past there was boisterous merry-making; in the Christmas of the present, amidst all the joy, there is an undertone of thanksgiving and tender prayer. Christmas fully realized, means the complete establishment of right relations between heaven and earth.

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Rev. W. H. WITHROW, D.D., Editor.

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Christmas Day.

LEGENDARY gospels of the early centuries go on to relate many marvels of the birth at Bethlehem; how the cattle kneeled to worship the infant Jesus; how mysterious splendours blazed in the sky; how in his first lispsings the infant of a day made known the fact of a pre-existent glory, the Son given.

An apocryphal passage describes the solemn awe of the nativity. The pole of the universe stood still. All nature was arrested in its course. Stars ceased to wheel, winds to blow, birds to fly, rivers to roll, and the world was thrown into deep amaze. But of this awful pause and hush of Nature we have no intimation in the New Testament. We prefer to read the facts of the Incarnation as described with idyllic sweetness by the Lord's Evangelists. It is enough for us to hear the angels sing. One of the earliest, and now amongst the most treasured hymns of the Christian Church, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, is but the angels' anthem set to music. That song is enshrined in our hearts.

Stately chants of the cathedral choirs, the gladness of Christmas hymns in the worship of all denominations, the joyous carols which delighted us in childhood—and never lose their charm—are but