

The Family.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS MORN.

ALM on the listening ear of night  
Came heaven's melodious strains,  
Where wild Judea stretches far  
Her silver-mantled plains.

O'er the blue depths of Galilee  
There comes a holier calm,  
And Sharon waves, in solemn praise,  
Her silent groves of palm.

Celestial choirs from courts above  
Shed sacred glories there;  
And angels with their sparkling lyres  
Make music in the air.

The answering hills of Palestine  
Send back the glad reply,  
And greet from all their holy heights  
The dawning from on high.

"Glory to God!" the sounding skies  
Loud with their anthems ring;  
"Peace to the earth, good-will to men,  
From heaven's eternal King!"

Light on thy hills, Jerusalem!  
The Saviour now is born;  
And bright, on Bethlehem's joyous plains,  
Breaks the first Christmas morn!

-E. H. Sears

MORE BLESSED TO GIVE.

THEY were talking about Christmas. Who has not been talking about it for a month past? The children were telling each other what they hoped to get. This boy was almost sure that his father would buy him a velocipede. And this girl wanted and expected a new doll that could open and shut its eyes; and so on. A good minister, the pastor of their parents, came near, but they were so engrossed in comparing Christmas notes that they did not see him, and he overheard what they were saying. He thought it would be a good time to give these lambs of his flock a Bible lesson. So, after saluting them kindly, he said: "My dear children, you are all expecting a happy Christmas, are you not?" "Yes, sir," they replied. "Well, you know that the word blessed in the Bible means happy. And when the Bible says that anything is a blessing, it means that it makes them happy who have it, or who do it. Now, the Apostle Paul tells us that this was a saying of the Lord Jesus himself: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' He means, of course, that to get nice things is pleasant, and should and does make people happy. But he declares that those who give the things are happier than those who get them. So, children, if you want to have a real merry Christmas, happier than any you have ever enjoyed, I can tell you how. You get something for your parents, and for the poor boys and girls in your neighbourhood, and you will find that what Christ says is true.

The children listened respectfully, yet somewhat sadly to the good pastor's words. This was a new view to them of how to be happy. They did not quite understand it, and yet it must be true since it was in the Bible. At length one sharp little fellow gathered up his wits and said: "Mr. Jones, oughtn't we to love our parents better than anybody else in the world?" "Certainly, my boy."

"Well, then, if we love them we should try to make them as happy as we can—happier than we are ourselves—shouldn't we?"

"Of course you should. That's just what I've been telling you. Get them some pretty Christmas gift, or make something for them and see how glad they will be."

"But," persisted the little fellow, "if it is more blessed to give than to receive, and we want them to be happier on Christmas than we are, isn't it the right way to let them give us lots of things? If we give to them they will be blessed as the Bible says, but not 'more blessed.' We want them to be more blessed, and they can't be unless we let them do all the giving."

The preacher was puzzled. I don't know just how he answered the boy. And I don't know just how to answer a good many people who come to me, or write to me, in the same spirit. They are so generous in the matter of giving that they want me to have the best of it all the time. Every mail brings me letters asking for a donation to some church or hospital, or to some impecunious individual; and they all quote the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." None of the writers are selfish. Oh, no, they are wholly benevolent. They want to make me happy. Indeed, they seem more anxious to promote my felicity—utter strangers to me though they are—than to help the needy institution or themselves. I am tempted sometimes to feel annoyed by the frequency and the pertinacity of these applications. But of course that would be wrong. I ought to be profoundly grateful. They generously offer me the best place—that of the more blessed, and are willing, in order that I may have it, to take the second place, that of the receiver, who though blessed, is so in an inferior degree.

his liberality. But a pauper, who understands the Bible better than the speaker rises in his place and says: "Not so. The obligation is on the other side. Mr. A. ought to be grateful to us. He has the best of it. We are blessed as receivers, but he is 'more blessed' as the giver. It needs poor folks like us to make a rich man like him happy. Instead of our thanking Mr. A., he ought to come and thank us." And then Mr. A., to be consistent and scriptural, should come forward and say: "That is right. You enjoy your dinner, but you cannot enjoy it as I do. I am your debtor, and I thank you for the blessed privilege of ministering to your wants."

If we could get this idea of the declaration of our Lord into the hands and hearts of all the rich people—if we could make them understand the superior blessedness of giving, what would our Board of Relief and other benevolent institutions do? Why, they would be deluged with donations. They would have to advertise for beneficiaries. They would have to send out all their soliciting agents as distributing agents. Instead of a midsummer drouth, when we have to pump up water, there would be a spring freshet. All the channels would be submerged and money would flow freely whenever it was needed. Just think of it—our millionaires going to Pauper Alley and Starvation Lane, hat in one hand and bag of gold in the other, and saying to the hungry and half-clad, Won't you do me the favour to take a hundred dollars and so make me happy? Strange as that sounds, there may be something like it in the millennium—that glad time when angels shall sing again, "Peace on earth, good will to men," and when the Lord Jesus, coming back in glory, shall repeat the words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."—Obadiah Oldschool, in Interior.

TO-DAY.

O NIGHT of nights! O night  
Desired of man so long!  
The ancient heavens fled forth in light  
To sing thee thy new song;  
And shooting down the steep,  
To shepherd folk of old,  
An angel, while they watched their sheep,  
Set foot beside the fold.

It was so long ago;  
But God can make it now,  
And as with that sweet overflow,  
Our empty hearts endow,  
Take, Lord, these words outworn,  
Oh, make them new for aye;  
Speak—"Unto you a child is born,"  
To-day—to-day—to-day!"

-Jean Ingelow.

CHRISTMAS IN FOREIGN LANDS.

IN Burgundy, carols are exceedingly popular. Indeed, not more cherished is the German's Christmas tree, with its glittering ornaments, and the Christ-child, or the Englishman's red holly-berries, mystic mistletoe, blazing hearth-fire and smoking plum-pudding, than are the ditties sung, all through Advent, until Christmas Eve, by the good folk of that province. Fireside gossip mingles with the quaintly-worded praises of "the little Jesus." Bagpipes drone in the village streets. The strolling minstrel is always accounted a welcome addition to the neighbourly hearth-side gatherings, and when Christmas Eve is past, the piper makes the round of the houses, whence he fails not to issue with many a compliment, as well as some small coin, by way of reward for the playing of his uncouth and shrill-sounding tunes.

Wine and chestnuts provide refreshment up to Christmas Eve; then, a big supper is furnished forth to as many as can assemble under one roof. Burning brands support the huge suche or yule-log, which is believed, by the small fry of Burgundian humanity, to fetch in its wake a delectable shower of sugar-plums. Therefore, as these little people as quiet as their superabundance of vitality will permit—for they know that, if good, something nice will be found to reward them, in their slippers or wooden shoes, on the morrow.

On the score of noise and hilarity, the grown-up folk atone for all deficiencies of the youngsters. "Noel! Noel!" echoes and re-echoes every-where until the midnight mass is said, to attend which the pious carry diminutive, parti-coloured tapers, amidst the jubilation of the chiming church-bells.

In Sweden, when, at their brightest, the aurora borealis make scintillate their crimson falchions, which rend the golden sky-curtain to let one see the purple fleets of cloud-land pass in an enchanting procession before the silver blink of the stars, then do the peasants dance on the straw in honour of yuletide, and rustic damsels throw straws at the roof-timbers, to ascertain, by the number of straws sticking thereon, how many grooms will stand beside their brides at the altar during the ensuing year. Songs and tales, brandy and nut-brown ale, and a great yule-cake, cheese-crowned, apple-wreathed, and set as the base for the three-branched Christmas candlestick, are all objects of importance at Swedish yuletide festivities.

In a country not far from where "the two spirits of the globe, the magnetic and the electric," according to Michellet, do nightly hold carnival in the polar circle, the poor Icelanders are allowed, as a rare treat, to have bread to eat with their Christmas mutton and milk porridge.

In Southern Lapland, should the householder neglect to provide an ample store of fuel for the season's needs, in popular belief, the disgusted yule-swains, or Christmas goblins, will so befoul the wood-pile, that there shall be no getting at its contents. There, also, it is, that the girl who wishes, nuptially speaking, to learn her fate, places a table in the centre of a vacant chamber, and on it two glasses—the one of water, the other of brandy; then taking a broom, she must sweep the room three times carefully, against the sun; and if she is to enter the married state, her future husband will appear before she completes the third round, and drink from the water glass, if a sober man, or from the brandy tumbler, if he be a drunkard. Again, if a Laplander at Christmas, before retiring, pulls off his boots and flings them over his left shoulder, he shall know, from the shoes pointing toward the door, whether a long journey or death will be his portion during the new year; but if, on the other hand, the boot toes turn inward, he can feel assured of another twelve-month's lease of his present existence.—December Table Talk.

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT.

Just after the election a woman residing in Indianapolis was reported in a daily paper saying, in reference to her favourite presidential candidate: Oh, I do hope that he is elected. For six weeks my husband and I have been making three prayers: first, that he might be elected; second, that my husband might get well, and third, that I might not get sick. And now, if all three of our prayers are answered, we are going to start in and pray for all the world! Probably, with some of this expansiveness of heart, a good many of us are ready just now, having had a good Christmas-time, made satisfactory collections, given and received some pleasant tokens of affection, interchanged warm and friendly expressions of good will with those around us, smiled once more into the face of the world, to join in the good-natured and self-contented prayer, "God bless us, every one."

How much of our Christmas spirit is of this nature—based on a sort of physical contentment, and a general, week-long satisfaction with our environments. We want the large, enduring, hopeful, loving spirit to possess us which shall lead us to be unselfish, cheery and benevolent all the year. The man who prayed, "God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more," no doubt felt very good and affectionate, but then neither he nor his prayer was very large, nor rose to the true proportions of the genuine Christmas spirit, in which the welfare of "men" and the "earth" is sought for.

THE WEEK OF PRAYER.

following so closely upon the Christmas season, would seem to be well and wisely placed, finding us with softened and opened hearts, realizing the world's universal need of the blessings of Christ. Whether at the best time of the year or not may be wisely questioned. There are arguments on both sides. It is certainly a good way to begin the year. Many a precious revival has commenced with the services of this week. One thing is certain; the programme this year is one commending itself to all interested in the week, above many of its predecessors. The prime object in the first observance of the week, in 1856, we believe, was to pray for the conversion of the heathen world to Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost in the work of missions. Gradually, in order to make a programme that would last through a week, every good object under the sun, at home and abroad, that was dear to Christian people, was introduced, and foreign missions left to Saturday evening, when a great many churches hold no services. Let us be aware of the spirit of formality, not to say formalism, to which we are tempted, by having a programme spread out before us, to pray our way through, topic by topic, as we weed and hoe our gardens, and feel that a good work has been done when we dispose of them one by one. Rather, let each of the world's great wants, as suggested by these topics, arouse our hearts in loving impetuosity to seek upon each the blessing of the Almighty Spirit.—Herald and Presbyterian.

The Children's Corner.

THE CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS

CHILDREN play at Christmas,  
Round the cheerful fire;  
Children sing sweet carols,  
To their hearts' desire;  
But the Christmas music  
Has too short a tune,  
And the joyous laughter  
Stops too soon.

Let us carry Christmas  
With us through the year,  
Bring the joys of Christmas  
Other hearts to cheer;  
Tell by gentle actions,  
And by looks of love,  
Of the peace Christ brought us  
From above.

For He left His riches  
And His palace bright,  
To bring home the children  
Wandering in the night.  
And He bids us follow  
In His footsteps blest,  
Giving others always  
Of our best.

VISITORS.

In coaches made of leather  
They go in crowds together,  
They every one wear party white,  
Although they come in broad daylight  
Nor stop for wind or weather.

We cannot do without them,  
Although we sometimes doubt them,  
And if you don't know what are these  
Just ask the postman, if you please,  
For he knows all about them.

-M. J. H., in Little Men and Women.

CATHERINE'S DECISION.

"Why should I divide my candy with Helen? Why should I?" demanded Catherine; "if they were put in my own stockings they must be meant for me; they are mine."

Madeline was silent, assorting her candies in two piles; now getting along smoothly enough, then waiting to think and to decide.

"Tell me, Madeline, why should I?" again demanded Catherine; "I do not wish to."

"Then do not do it, sister," replied Madeline. "You know it must be a free gift, or it is no love gift at all."

"But why should I?" persisted Catherine; "if Helen were my sister, like you, and had none, it would be different; but why should I now?"

"Ask mamma about it," replied Madeline; "mamma knows about everything."

"But you know too. What made you coax me to do it?"

"Because I thought you would like it, and it would please Helen, and that it would make you feel glad all day."

"Oh, but, Madeline, why ought I to like it? I do not like it; why should I?"

"Because this is the day for love-gifts."

"What are love-gifts? You are a funny Madeline."

"Something we give for love's sake," replied Madeline, after stopping a minute to think.

"But suppose I do not love Helen so dreadfully much, then I cannot give her these candies for love's sake; now, Madeline, do you think I can?"

"Yes," replied Madeline, decidedly, at the same time viewing a pretty candy she held in her hand with uncertain eye. Which pile should this candy be laid with; her own, or the one she was selecting for Helen? She decided that Helen might have it, as the last very pretty one she had laid on her own pile.

"What makes you say 'yes?' I do not like you to say yes. How can I give it for love's sake if I do not love Helen so dreadfully much?"

"Do you remember whose birthday this is, Catherine?"

"Yes; mine, of course."

"But who else was born on Christmas Day?"

"Jesus. But, Madeline, it is polite to answer people when they ask a question."

inquired mamma, "that you should do no matter if you like it or not?"

"I am just going to fix Jesus' love-gift for Helen. I do not love her so dreadfully much, either, but if I should, I should, and I like it."—Christian at Work.

Our Story.

AT CHRISTMAS TIME

Usually he was the liveliest and most wide-awake of all the Eastside miners; but this night his heavy eyebrows nearly met with the frown on his face, and first one and then another inquired what was "up" with Lon. It was midway between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and ever since Thanksgiving Day, Lon had been growing sober, and, as one of the men expressed it, "rather touchy." And when the men, on the night alluded to, gathered about the long, rude table of the lodging-house for the customary game of cards, Lon Marcus put on his greatcoat without a word to any one, and went out.

"Now, where do you suppose he's going?" asked Ben Hanscom, a great muscular fellow, six feet in height, but with a fine eye and by no means a forbidding countenance; although his long beard gave him rather a rough appearance.

"He's going out to mope and sulk, I reckon," said Bill Bixby, a thoughtless fellow, who cared more for drink and cards than for anything else in the world.

"Well, I'm done with him," exclaimed rollicking St. Wilkins; "who's going to play, and who isn't? For my part, I believe Lon's homesick, but hates to own himself a baby."

"I guess he'd 'baby' you once he heard you air opinions of that kind," retorted Ben Hanscom, his fine eyes taking on a new expression not altogether pleasant to contemplate.

"Well, don't get mad, old boy. I don't think we need a row in the family to enlighten things," said Bill Bixby. "Hullo!" he added, "here comes Tom Frothingham and Nick Holland. I say, Holland, take a hand, you and Tom."

"We met Marcus on the way home," said Tom Frothingham, as he and his companion seated themselves at the table. "Not so very inviting a night to be out, I should think; it blows big guns, and what with the lonesomeness and the racket of the wind, a man must want exercise pretty bad to walk out to-night."

"Something's come over Lon," replied Ben Hanscom; "all at once he's stumped, and from being one of the jolliest, he's one of the glummiest of the crowd."

"Little homesick, perhaps," suggested Nick Holland.

"Just what I proposed," said Bill Bixby, "but Hanscom shut me up with a bang."

"Well, suppose he is!" said Nick Holland again. Nick was a young fellow of about eighteen, with fair, curly hair, a clear, white skin, and red, boyish cheeks. "Suppose he is," he repeated, "it's about the worst time in the world for a fellow reared outside of heathendom to think of home, if he ever had one. We're none of us very old," he added; "and if the truth were known, we nearly all ran away from home, in the first place, because we didn't want to mind anyone, but we're bound to cut all restraint. I've more'n half a mind to bolt myself," he concluded, with passionate emphasis.

"Real neat little speech for a youngster of your age; quite well worded, too," said Tom Frothingham, with a patronizing smile.

"I don't know as I objected to the homesick idea so much," said Ben Hanscom, his face unconsciously taking on a longing expression, "but what I did flare up it was hinting there was anything of the baby in Lon Marcus."

"No offence meant, old man," said Bixby, impatiently fingering the cards and shuffling and cutting them with great deftness and skill. "Come, come!" he added, tapping the table with the edge of the pack, "who's ready for the game?"

At this they all gave attention, the cards were quickly dealt, and the game went on. It was about half an hour later that the door opened, and Lon Marcus stood before them, a new excitement in his eyes. At sight of his flushed face and nervous manner, inquiring looks were raised to his face, but the men were mute, waiting to hear his story, if, indeed, in that dull region there could be a story to tell.

"Say, comrades, what do you think?" he began in a suppressed voice. "I believe you profess to be something of an M.D., don't you?" he inquired, turning to Tom Frothingham.

"I studied medicine a year or two," answered Frothingham.

"Well, you will have a chance to test what skill you may have in a few minutes," Lon went on. "It's a tough case, but there's a poor old fellow who is probably dying by the central shaft. He was to go on with a company of men who intend to form a settlement at the old Henchman Gulch. They are going to try to work the old lead, and this appears to be a man who joined them after the original party started. He's older than any of the rest of them, and far older than any of us; about sixty, I should say. The others must push on to the end of their journey, but this poor fellow can't go another step. I told them that they

could leave him here, where there was a set of young men decently settled, and we'd do what we could for him. They'll have him here on a litter directly. We couldn't let him die out in the cold, you know."

His eyes appealed to the Hercules of the family as he spoke, stalwart Ben Hanscom, who answered promptly, "No, sir! I guess not! Not if we know ourselves!"

"Now, how best to make ready for our poor guest, that is the question," said Lon, looking around.

"There's the feather bed you all laughed at my bundling up and bringing along; you can put the poor fellow on that and welcome," said Nick Holland. "I know how to make first-rate gruel," said Bill Bixby, pocketing the cards and willing, for once, to tolerate an unfinished game.

"And I'll watch to-night; I'm a game watcher; quite a respectable species of owl when it comes to watching," put in St. Wilkins.

"There isn't, in reality, a single heathen amongst us, put us to our test," said Lon Marcus, "and I knew there wasn't. I knew I could count on every one of you fellows to do what you could for a poor dying man. It's hard," he continued, "that there's never a woman around to remind him of the mother he must have had once, and the place won't seem over home-like; but we'll do the best we can."

At the end of an hour, a poor, worn-out man was being as comfortably cared for as he could be in the old lodging-house, where, as Lon Marcus had truly said, was never a woman to minister with deft and tender touch to his fast lessening necessities. The party with whom he had journeyed were only too glad that warmth and shelter had been found by the way.

For a day or two the man was too exhausted to speak more than a word or two at a time; then there was a partial rally. Tom Frothingham, who had some doctor's skill, and was also possessed of keen perceptions and a quick eye, knew almost at the first glance that the sick man's hours were numbered. But everything that could be done was done. Had anyone supposed the inmates of the Eastside lodging-house merely rough, heartless men before this sufferer was dropped among them, no such impression would have lingered after seeing him cared for as he was. The men went and came on tiptoe. Not a quick word was spoken. Each was willing, helpful, subdued. Conversation was held in low, friendly tones. The reality of some oncoming event of solemn import was duly recognized and respected. Once when Lon Marcus ventured a kindly inquiry as to whether he should write to anyone, or send for friends, the answer was returned with desperate sadness:

"I belong to no one, and no one living belongs to me. I'm just going alone; that's all. Lay me anywhere when I go; there's no one to question or care about the spot."

It was a week since he had been brought to them, and a week before Christmas that a night came when the invalid's restlessness seemed prophetic.

"I want you all," he cried, his eyes large and bright and his face flushed. "I want you all! I want some one to tell me the things they used to tell me years ago, way back when I was a boy. You're all young yet, and can remember about them?"

Tom Frothingham tried to quiet him; but it was no use. Whatever was on his mind was forcing itself out with resistless force, and finally Tom went to the inner room to summon the rest.

"Come on, mates," he said, "our poor old charge is going fast, and there's something on his mind he either wants us to help tell him, or else he wants to tell us."

They stood in hushed silence about the little cot. Seeing them all there, he began in a feeble, anxious voice:

"You've been mighty kind, oh, mighty kind, to a poor old body like me. I know well enough it ain't been pleasant to have an old man drop down among you just to die; but I want one thing more. I want some one to tell me about those things I used to hear very long ago, before I ran away from everything good and religious. I mean things about God and heaven and Christ. Oh, yes," he added, longingly, "that's it; tell me all about Christ. You see I want Him now. Tell me me right off, some one, how does He save folks? You must know!"

His hungry eyes swept over the faces of the six men, all in their early prime, and one, that of Nick Holland, the face of a mere boy.

"You have to believe in Him," said Nick, softly, his boyish face flushing as he spoke.

"Yes; yes; but how do you begin to believe?"

The restless eyes, no less than the importunate voice, demanded immediate reply.

"Why, you have to give yourself up," said Lon Marcus, his sensitive face showing clear in the flickering light of the candles.

"Yes, yes! But I've been a hard case. I ran away from my parents because they would teach me Christ. Then I ran away from churches and decent society, because I wanted nothing of Christ; and I came to places like this settlement, to hear less of Christ, and now I know, when it's too late, mates, that there's nothing nor no one but just Christ can ease the pain of my soul, and I tell you it's awful! Do,