

Christmas Ballad.

THE night the King was born, the stars
Shone down on Bethlehem,
As jewels flash through golden bars
From out a diadem.
But suddenly their radiant fire
Grew pale and dull and dim,
When came from heaven an angel-choir
To sing a Christmas hymn.

Such music never yet had rung
On mortal ears till then,
As rung when holy angels sung
"Good will and peace to men."
Such winsome glory never came
Before on mortal eyes
As came when they, with feet of flame,
Came trooping down the skies.

And if on that first Christmas-time,
This lost world back to call
To hope and God, in sweetest chime
The bells of heaven rang all:
Would it be strange, if echo sweet
Of that transcendent strain
Should run o'er earth with footsteps fleet,
And answer back again?

Sing, angels, never cease to sing,
Ye first-born of the sky!
Cry, every herald of the King,
His glorious advent cry;
But angel from the heaven above
Or herald of the morn,
Could never sing the song of love
As men—that Christ is born.

—S. S. Times.

Miss Pecher's Christmas.

BY M. E. WINSLOW.

It was decidedly not a success; raked it out as she might, a cylinder stove could not be coaxed into any resemblance to a Yule-log, nor could the trim, bright kerosene lamp be made to simulate the quivering flame and delicious waxy odour of Christmas candles. Nor, again, could the fat cur, distinguished as much by his ugliness as his affection, by any stretch of imagination personate the sweet home circle of ten, twenty, and thirty years ago, though he exerted himself to the utmost to assist in the illusion, wagging his stump of a tail to the utmost of its capacity, rubbing his crisp, short hair against Miss Pecher's chair, and looking up in her face with his sensible brown eyes to assure his mistress of his continued presence and sympathy. Pug was one of Miss Pecher's trophies, rescued years ago, as a half-starved puppy, from the hands of a boy who was drowning him in a water-butt.

"Ten, twenty, thirty years. Can it be possible?" Yes, it was, for nearly forty Christmases had passed over the lady's head, leaving here and there a trace of their snows, though the warm, sunny nature beneath had done much to prevent their drifting. "Thirty years ago. That was when Agnes, and I, and Tom, and baby Mary had our first Christmas tree—a new thing then, and to us so wonderful. Twenty years ago. That was after mother's death, when the house was so sad, and Agnes and I tried to make a little Christmas brightness for the children, and father called me his good little housekeeper, and said I almost filled the vacant place in our home. Ten years ago. How many changes had come then! Father was gone, the home gone, baby Mary was married and settled in the far west, and Tom—poor Tom. Pug, you didn't know Tom, so you musn't tell how that bright, beautiful boy first ruined his father and broke his heart, and then ran away, leaving Agnes and me to struggle on as best two women might. And Agnes was always delicate, and soon broke down under the steady work, long hours, and close air. The doctor had told me, but I had not let

her know yet, and I resolved that her last Christmas should be just as happy as I could make it. So we had Christmas candles, and a cake, and I gave her the blue quilted wrapper and warm lined slippers, which she wore to the very last. Poor Agnes, I am so glad I was able to do something for her—but, Pug, you and I must keep Christmas alone to-night, and we're not going to be sentimental, so we'll just be as jolly as we can."

Miss Pecher certainly did not look sentimental. The fashionably-dressed young ladies in the cloak department of which she was forewoman, at La Grange's, were apt to speak of her as that queer stingy old maid, because she so seldom changed the fashion of her dress, wore her clothes so long, and made her own bonnets of such costly materials and in such remarkable shape. They did not reflect how little was left of Miss Pecher's salary after paying the rent of her three cosy little rooms, with their fire and light, her three meals a day, and car fare. And they did not know that every cent she could possibly spare by the closest and most rigid economy went into the mission school treasury to supply, so far as possible, the multiform necessities of the exceedingly poor neighbourhood in which it was situated and she lived.

Now, when you mention the mission school you touched the key-note of the master passion of Miss Pecher's life. It was the one love, duty, care, interest, responsibility, and dissipation of her otherwise lonely existence. Its weekly teachers' meeting, prayer-meeting, sewing meeting, and all the other "occasional meetings," as they came along, so filled up the little forewoman's unoccupied time that she rarely had a whole evening to give to her four-footed companion. She would not have been at home alone this Christmas eve, when there was an "entertainment" at the school, if she had not managed six weeks before to step sideways off the school stairs one dark night, the result of which was a badly-sprained ankle, multitudes of bruises, a long, tedious confinement, and the loss of six weeks' salary, which she regretted quite as much for its incapacitating her from giving her share of work and money to the Christmas festival at the "Sarepta" as for the necessary doing without the new warm shawl which she had meant to have this winter.

It was to many people a wonder how simple, plain, little Miss Pecher managed by a judicious mixture of earnest consecration, strong common sense, genuine interest in them, entirely removed from mawkish sentiment, to draw together and hold for so many years that class of rough street boys. But she did it, and almost any one else would have been gratified with her great success. But to-night, at least, the dark side of things was apt to come uppermost, and as she mentally called the roll of that watched, tended, and often prayed for class, the disappointments, failures, and lapses of its members so weighed her down that she almost felt as though her labour was lost, and that it had better pass into more competent hands.

I am afraid the little lady was becoming sentimental again, when suddenly Pug started up with a low growl, followed by a succession of short, sharp barks which partly drowned the clattering of heavy shoes up the uncarpeted staircase, followed by a sudden silence and a timid knock.

"Come in," said Miss Pecher, from her cosy chair, and a singular sight presented itself. There they were, as many as could be got together at any one time in their wild street-life and with them several faces which she dimly remembered when years ago they belonged to small or medium sized boys, rather than to the men who owned them now.

"Come in," again said the teacher, and in they came, awkwardly but bravely, depositing on the table a miscellaneous pile of oranges, apples, nuts, cakes, popcorn, candy, and the like.

"You tell her," said one voice. "No, you—you"—and after some confusion, one small boy, whose face had been washed for the occasion, said:

"It's the Christmas tree, teacher. We knew as you was sick, and couldn't come, so we all saved our goodies to bring 'em to you. My mother likes oranges when she's sick, don't you?"

"Very much," said Miss Pecher, her ready tact teaching her that it would not do to add, as she longed to, "but I'd rather you'd keep them."

"Teacher," said a red-faced boy, the biggest of the present class, producing a package hitherto hidden behind him, "here's a Christmas present some o' us boys has got yer. We thought yer shawl looked kind o' thin last Sunday yer was out."

And he unrolled a soft, warm, plaid shawl, the very realization of that which she had intended to get before her sickness, and which she knew must have cost as much as ten dollars. How had the boys got the money, and who put it into their heads to buy that shawl? Perhaps it was the Lord Himself. It is like Him, she thought, reverently, and raising her eyes to thank her boys, caught those of a young man, a favourite scholar of years ago, who unrolled and handed her a "Teacher's Bible," one other possession she had secretly coveted, saying:

"My woman says you've saved us more'n that by makin' me leave off ter-baccar, an' we've both on us worked hard to be able ter get yer something to make yer remember yer old scholar, Tim, and forget all the trouble he used ter give yer. I chose a Bible," he said, in a low tone, "because yer taught me ter read it, an' every night since I was married Nance and me reads a chapter out o' that Bible yer gave me, and says a prayer just as yer said."

"That's too lovely," said the teacher, producing a pen and ink. "Now, boys, just write all your names on the first page for me to remember this Christmas night by."

Those were curious signatures, traced by hands all unused to wield a pen, but no autograph hunter ever valued his collection of distinguished names as little Miss Pecher did that blotted and disfigured page. While some of the boys were writing she questioned the others about the shawl.

"How did you ever get so much money, Jake?"

"Well, it was Tom that started it. He and Jim and Jack and I sleep at the lodgin' house, and Tom says, when he heard you was sick, 'Boys, let's do as Miss Pecher said, when she told us how it's more blessed to give than to receive. So we put all our money in the box at the lodgin' house every night, and when we asked the superintendent for it he was astonished, it was so much. The other boys and the new teacher made up the rest, and the matron she buyed the shawl. I don't never mean

to buy no cakes and peanuts any more, money counts up so fast when you save it. Teacher," he added somewhat shyly, "I know what yer meant in that lesson about it's more blessed to give I think Jesus must ha' felt happy, like we do, when He gave Himself for us."

"It's more blessed to receive, sometimes," said his teacher; but she was interrupted by a timid little hand, which laid in hers a tiny bouquet of hot-house violets and roses.

"I didn't have no pennies to put in with the other boys," its owner said. "My father licks me if I don't give him all I get, but I wanted to gi' ye some-thing, so I went to the big flower store up there in Cross street and helped carry home the Christmas nosegays, and when the gen'lman was goin' ter gi' me pennies, I said wouldn't he gi' me flowers instead, cos I wanted 'em fur a lady. He laughed and one o' the men told me to pick up all that was left, so I did, and hope yer'll like 'em. Teacher," continued the boy, so low that she was forced to bend her head to hear, "I've missed yer since ye was sick, awful. I want ter tell yer somethin'. I'm jes chock-full, I'm so glad. Do ye mind how yer telled me 'bout Jesus bein' so ready to forgive a f-oller, an' help him ter be good. Well, it's true, cos I tried it, and he's forgiv' me, and I mean ter try ter be the best boy that ever was to please him an' you."

Precious little flowers, how she clasped them! How through many coming years, every time she opened her Bible, their faded sweetness spoke of the little street boy won for Christ.

It was almost Christmas morning when the boys, having been thanked in a few loving words, words which, without cant or hypocrisy, and taking their text from this Christmas "good-will," spoke of the blessedness of the great Giver in giving, and of every child of God in receiving the great Christmas gift. And having departed thoughtfully to their several homes, Miss Pecher, turning down her lamp and locking her door, said to Pug, "It's time you and I went to bed. We can't eat all those cakes and oranges, though we couldn't offend the boys by refusing them, but to-morrow, if I can't wear the new shawl to church, we'll call in some of the little bits of dirty children round in the alley and give them a feast, and in spite of sentiment we'll have a merry Christmas."

VIRTUE is a rough way, but it proves at night a bed of down.

SIR HUMPHREY DAVY, when quite a young man and assistant-lecturer on chemistry at the Royal Institution, was much sought after by society. Engrossed in his laboratory, he would often, it is said, remain calmly conducting his experiments till he left himself no time to dress for dinner, and in his haste he would "clothe himself upon" with white and clean linen without "unclothing himself" of that which had ceased to be sweet and fresh. One day he would be of aldermanic proportions, wearing a wardrobe of five shirts on his back and five pairs of stockings on his calves, till he was able to snatch an hour from science and frivolity; and then he would appear, to the consternation of his friends, but a shadow of his former greatness. These alterations of physical bulk were matters of sore perplexity and alarm till the cause of them was discovered.