

THE EMPTY STOCKING.

PLAYING and rollicking out in the street, Laughing so heartily, smiling so sweet, Was wee little Jimmy, with other small boys, Who joyously spoke of the candies and toys With which Santa Claus their stockings should fill, While they in their beds should be sleeping and still

So happy was he when at night he undressed And went to his bed, that he scarcely would rest,

But tho't of how happy his mother should be In the morn, when his toys and playthings, she'd see; He thought she would wonder—and stare too—because

He ne'er heard her tell of old Santa Claus

Again and again he awoke from his sleep, And fancied he heard old Santa Claus creep Adown thro' the chimney, and slip up to where

His stocking was hung on the back of the chair; Nor tho't for one moment that when he believed The Santa Claus story, he was sadly deceived.

Long and dark seemed the night and scarce had it fled,

When wee little Jimmy jumped out of his bed, With his heart full of joy he slid up to the chair,

To see what good things were awaiting him there;

But what did he see, to crush his delight? The same empty stocking he hung up last night.

His joyful young eye with a tear became dim, While he wondered why Santa Claus thus slighted him; And little he knew how his dear mother sighed

That she was too poor some small gifts to provide;

But when he grows up he'll be able to say Why his stocking was empty at dawning to-day.

A. H. S.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BELLS.

BY CONTENT GREENLEAF.

VERY early on Christmas morning, before the sun was up, the church bells through the city rang right merrily.

Jim crept from his bed in the corner of the garret, slipped on his clothes and got nearer to the little window to listen. What could the bells be saying? His grandmother had told him only the evening before of the song the angels sang to the shepherds on the first Christmas morning: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men," and now to Jim the bells seemed to echo the same words, saying over and over again, "Good-will, good-will."

He knelt on the floor and leaned on the low bench which served for a seat and a table, and listened to the sweet chimes. Soon the ringing seemed to grow fainter and fainter until there was only a low murmuring of tones. Then as he listened more attentively he thought he could distinguish words, and the bells seemed to be talking among themselves.

"What a happy errand we have to-day," said one which had a sweet and silvery voice, "to ring out the message that Christmas day is here, and to remind the world once more that a Saviour was born to them on this day."

"And strange that so many forget it all through the year," said another in a deep mellow tone. "I really believe if Christmas day did not come once in twelve months, that the world would soon forget the gift of Jesus to men."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed another bell

"some never forget it, I'm sure; it is so happy and joyful a season that surely the good-will felt towards each other then, stretches out through the whole year."

"But how strange it is," said the deep-toned bell, speaking again, "that so many will put away the Christmas peace from their own hearts by cherishing hard feelings towards others."

Here Jim felt very uncomfortable and could not help thinking of Tom Norris, who had once cheated him in trading him a worthless knife for two good marbles. He almost wished the hard-hearted bell would stop talking and let some of the sweeter ones say something; but no, it continued:

"The blessed Christmas peace can never come to a heart which has any hard feelings towards another, and if one loses peace of mind at this happy time there is little hope that he can get it back during the year."

Here Jim stirred uneasily and the bells seemed to chime again, "Peace and good-will, good-will," but above the sound of their ringing he heard his grandmother's voice near him: "Jim, wake up! and a happy Christmas."

He started up and there was grandmother with bonnet and shawl on, for she had just returned from market.

"Oh! then it was only a dream!" he exclaimed rubbing his eyes, "and the bells are only ringing."

"Only ringing," said his grandmother, "but come, you have been catching cold as well as dreaming; and breakfast is nearly ready, but it is not much for Christmas morning," and she sighed, remembering the days when they had more comforts.

Jim followed her down the ladder which served for stairs to his room in the garret, and there was the table set for three in the warm kitchen. His little sister was already in her place, and clapped her hands on seeing Jim.

"Happy Christmas, Jim! And what do you think grandmother has got for us? batter cakes with both sugar and syrup, 'cause it's to-day—and a big apple and orange for you and me."

Sure enough, a bright yellow orange and a red-cheeked apple were beside each plate. Jim had not tasted an orange for nearly a year, and he could not remember that he had ever had so nice an apple, for such luxuries were almost unknown in his poor home.

There was a struggle in Jim's mind, for here was a chance to "make up" with Tom, and such an opportunity might not come again for a long time. "For," thought Jim bitterly to himself, "he won't believe I want to make up if I only say so; but I guess he would understand what an orange meant."

So seizing it from the table he explained: "I'll be back in just a minute, grandma. I want to have a little of the peace and good-will all the year—you know what I dreamed the bells said," and with this explanation he hurried out.

Grandmother turned toward the stove to bake some cakes, saying thoughtfully, "Well, well! there's no accounting for what boys will do. I only hope it is all right."

Jim's smiling face through breakfast time and all day was a pleasant assurance that he was satisfied that it was all right, and every time he hears a church bell ring he listens for some message, for he is quite sure they have something to say if he can only understand.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

WHO has not felt his heart stirred to its inmost depths by the sound of the Christmas carol? What song so truly full of peace, of love and of joy as that? And what would merry old Christmas be, with all its old-time festivities, without its glad carols ringing out upon the frosty air, to the accompanying music of the sweet Christmas chimes?

"And all the bells on earth shall ring, On Christmas day, on Christmas day."

It is natural for us to sing when we are glad, and carol-singing once formed a principal feature at all great feasts and banquets. But in later times the carol seems to have been devoted to Christmas alone, and when the yule log was blazing brightly upon the wide hearth, and the green mistletoe boughs hung from the walls and decorated windows and doors, the wassail bowl was filled to overflowing, and true friends pledged each other with a joyful Christmas song.

Carol-singing continued in all its vigour until the close of the last century. Since then it has gradually declined, except in the schools and churches of to-day, and around the home fireside, where sweet young voices still join in chanting the Christmas carols.

In Shakespeare's time carols were sung in the streets at night during Christmas by the waits, or watches, who expected to receive gifts for their singing. Many a writer of old times and customs refers to the "wakeful ketches of Christmas eve." It was after the Reformation that they ceased to sing Latin hymns in the churches, and substituted the sweet Christmas carols. For there were two kinds of carols in vogue—those of a devotional nature, which were sung not only in the churches, but also through the streets from house to house upon Christmas eve, and even after that, morning and evening, until Twelfth Day.

A famous carol thus represents the Virgin contemplating the birth of the Divine infant:—

"He neither shall be clothed In purple nor in pall, But all in fair linen, As were babies all;

He neither shall be rocked, In silver nor in gold, But in a wooden cradle, That rocks on the mould."

In the northern part of England they still sing carols, and even in the great metropolis, London, some solitary veteran who has not forgotten the merry customs of his earlier years, may sometimes be heard upon Christmas eve singing in a plaintive voice, "God rest you, merry gentlemen!"

In Ireland the singing of carols continues to the present day, while in Scotland, where no church feasts have been kept since the days of John Knox, carol singing is unknown.

The famous Christmas carol of Oxford, which is sung when the boar's head, gay with garlands and green herbs, is brought to the table with the greatest pomp, runs thus:—

*Caput apri deſtro
Reddens laudes Domino*
The boar's head in bands bring,
With garlands gay and rosemary,
I pray for all sing merrily,
Qui estis in convivio.

The boar's head, I understande,
Is the chiefe service in this lande,
Look, wherever it be fande,
Servite cum Cantico.

Bands of music as well as the singing of the wassail song, were also heard from early dawn until midnight, and the bellman, ceasing a little while from ringing out the merry Christmas chimes, went his rounds with copies of verses which he distributed at the different houses, with the good wishes of the season—just as the newsboys and letter-carriers do now. But, as each year glides swiftly and silently into the past, some quaint, familiar custom drops away into oblivion and is lost forever.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.

HERE came a little child to earth,
Long ago;
And the angels of God proclaimed his birth
High and low.

Out in the night, so calm and still,
Their song was heard:
For they knew that the Child on Bethlehem's hill
Was Christ the Lord.

Far away in a goodly land,
Fair and bright,
Children with crowns of glory stand,
Robed in white.
They sing, the Lord of heaven so fair
A child was born:
And that they might his crown of glory share,
Wore crown of thorn.

In mortal weakness, want, and pain,
He came to die,
That the children of earth might in glory reign
With him on high.

And evermore in robes so fair,
And undefiled,
Those ransomed children his praise declare
Who was a child.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

HERE is something very beautiful and touching in this gift season of the year, and its association with the birth of Christ, God's greatest gift to the world. It is of no consequence whether the old Pope who hit on the 25th of December for Christmas was right or wrong in his calculation. The venerating, grateful love and worship of millions do not draw their inspirations from the almanac. To fitly celebrate such an event as the birth of Jesus of Nazareth is enough to lift any day to the highest point of distinction. It is easy to see how the early Christians, out of their abounding love and gratitude for the birth of the Saviour, came to make the Christmas festival beautiful as their gift day, and how the celebration gained in human interest and regard from the association of human kindness and tenderness and affection with God's infinite compassion. And slowly and steadily this beautiful custom has grown until the gift season overlaps the day and fills a whole week with its fragrance and cheer. It is not strange that Christmas is the most popular festival in the year; for it is associated with all the joys of childhood, the pleasures of youth, the friendship and affection of maturity and the recollections of age. It has been completely humanized, and all that is sweetest and tenderest in human nature blooms then into beautiful dispositions and acts. And it is well to continue the custom which appeals to all that is divinest in the human heart, and lifts humanity heavenward.