

OUR HOME CIRCLE.

ON JUDEA'S PLAINS.

What sudden blaze of song
Spreads o'er the expanse of heaven?
In waves of light it thrills along,
The angelic signal given—
"Glory to God!" from yonder central fire
Flows out the echoing lay beyond the starry
choir.

Like circles widening round
Upon a clear blue river,
Orb after orb the wondrous sound
Is echoed on forever:
"Glory to God on high! on earth be peace!
And love toward men of love—salvation and
release!"

Wrapped in his swaddling bands,
And in his manger laid,
The Hope and Glory of all lands,
Is come to the world's aid:
No peaceful home upon his cradle smiled,
Guests rudely went and came where slept the
royal child.

Thee, on the bosom laid
Of a pure virgin mind,
In quiet ever, and in shade,
Slumbered and safe may find;
They who have bowed and taught to Nature's way,
And they who follow Truth along her star-
raved way.

John Kelle.

A GERMAN CHRISTMAS
EVE.

Christmas in the Rhine-land is the "Weihnacht," the "consecrated night," and the depth and genuineness with which it is recognized as an epoch can never be doubted by one who has shared in its observance. There is a simple-hearted, childlike delight in the festival that cannot be imitated or reproduced. The children's joy is the leading feature. Nowhere else does the Christ-Kind bring all the treasures, and nowhere is there the genuine homage of loving hearts for the Christ-child and his day that one sees here. One never asks a child, "what were his Christmas presents," but "what did the Christ-child bring him," and many a "Christ-baum" (or tree) bears a lovely child image at the top, as if giving and blessing. It is true the "Weihnacht's man" is sometimes pictured and mentioned, but he is evidently an importation, and is regarded as rather a spurious fellow, whoever he may be. This is a home feast; every family, however small or poor, childless people, aged couples, each household which has a roof or a room, has its consecrated tree, its candles, its "fest," tiny though it be.

The trees, brought from the mountain sides, are of all sizes, from two feet high to those which should graze the lofty ceiling in homes of wealth, and range in price from a few cents to more than half a dollar. The smaller ones are generally fastened into a flat board, surrounded with rude fence rails and carpeted with moss for grass, in which stand several domestic animals and fowls of fearful proportions, with impossible legs, of small sticks stuck into the plaster of their bodies. Often they are further disguised or deformed by wads of wool fastened upon them, or by being stained in gaudy colors, and the one intended to represent the house-father among his pets is usually the most painful nondescript of all. Most families buy and take home their tree many days before the eventful night, and the good house-mother is privately very busy gilding and silvering nuts and ornaments, making little balloons with fluted sides, one of the prettiest of all the decorations, and cutting fanciful shapes from colored papers to adorn the dear tree. From last year's stores are brought out beautiful things, and if possible one (or more) of every kind of fruit known to the mother is hung upon the branches. There is nothing the Christmas tree may not be expected to bring forth. Lovely, translucent cherries, currants, berries of each variety with green leaves are prized very highly, and tiny cakes in fanciful shapes, animals, etc., are suspended from every branch. Sometimes the mother spreads a narrow strip of the finest cotton-wool along each branch and twig to the farthest needle-tips, to represent snow, and children are always charmed with this addition to the dark green. Again shreds of glittering gilt and silver foil, which will not take fire, are thrown over the entire tree, with charming effect, as if the moss drapery of a Southern forest had been magically turned to gold. Then come the candle-holders, and when these are arranged, whether they be the scores of elegant polished sockets which are to support the pure wax tapers in the Burgomaster's salon, or the half dozen twisted bits of tin which the poor woman who pastes bills all day in the street has carefully saved, and a few apples hung low down, with perhaps two or three tiny dolls bound into their cradles, German fashion, all is ready for the touch of the matches.

But the Eve has arrived, the family are all together, the candles are being lighted one by one, the other lights are extinguished, and

with the inimitable German "So!" the mother turns to the beaming children, and they proceed to enjoy in the most thorough and substantial manner the spectacle of all others revered and beloved. Round and round the tree they go, pointing to each fruit by name, to the tri-colored and gilt flags, the spirals of tinsel springing with every motion of the boughs, and delighted if a twig scorches and sends out its well-loved odor. The mother is praised for her skill, and the grandparents sit in placid joy "keeping Christmas Eve," often with glad tears on their cheeks. The mother seems to think the plants beneath the tree need arranging, and stooping down among them, suddenly a tiny column of water shoots up from a cleverly concealed tin fountain, and the spray falls carelessly back sparkling in the soft wax light. The surprise is welcomed with an appreciative joy that well repays all the trouble it has cost, and before the reservoir is exhausted the giving and receiving of presents begin and new surprises come thick and fast.

How many, many gifts! Next summer's wants and tastes are not forgotten, and for the entire year's furnishing thoughts have been busy and fingers industrious. How dainty are the painted fans which prove the skill of one modest daughter. Another has crocheted white borders of gay colors upon new rugs which are to lie before the sofa and piano, and very pretty they look, though queer to our eyes. Delicate china cups, letters in gilt "For the House-Master," "the House-Frau," "the Grossvater" and the "Grossmutter" promise new pleasure in coffee drinking. The little girls receive a stout doll's bedstead, fitted like all German beds, with a wedge shaped hair bolster, making a stiff inclined plane for the head, a big square pillow, and a high plumeau or feather bed over the one blanket. The pillow and plumeau cases have homemade lace inserted all around the edges, through which the red inner covers peep brightly. Every German boy must have a wagon, or the universal toy of Germany, a wooden horse on wheels. The little ones are soon softly stroking the mane and tail of such a one, while rejoicing over their pretty nuts. Oh, the happy home group! Thanks, smiles, tears, pretty speeches, reserves melted away, hidden treasures of affectionate hearts unlocked—how rapidly goes on the blessed work of the Christmas season. Verily this is the "consecrated night," and the *Christ-baum* is something more than a tree of earthly growth from a German forest.—*Christian Union*.

THEOLOGY FOR CHILDREN.

What shall we teach our children to believe in order that when they grow up they may find that later experience shall not alter what they have learned when they were young? We must teach them that beyond and above what they may see, or feel or touch, goodness, kindness, modesty, courage, usefulness, these are the best things in all the world. It is true that goodness and courage have no faces that we can kiss, have no hands that we can clasp, yet they are certainly there in the midst of our work and our play; this goodness, which, except in outward acts, we cannot see, is something which existed long before we were born. It is from this that we have all the pleasant things in this world. The flowers, the sunshine, the moonlight—all these were given to us by some great kindness and goodness which we have never seen at all; and this goodness, which is everywhere, is that great power out of which all things come. And we call this great power by the name of God; and because God is so much above us, we call him by the name which is the most dear to us and the most above us of all the names on earth—we call him our Father. When the father of children goes away from home, still his children know he is somewhere, though they cannot see him; and they know what they can do to please him. And so it is with the great unseemly Father of us all. Let us then, teach our children that God is goodness and love. Let us teach them that the rules which he has laid down for the government of this world are his will and wish for us. Even the frost and cold, even sickness and pain are for our good; and we must trust that he has sent them to us for some good reason to make us strong and healthy and brave. Thus you will see in Westminster Abbey, on the monument of Sir John Franklin, who was so long shut up in the ice, the words, "O ye frost and cold! O ye ice and snow! bless ye the Lord and magnify his name for ever." This is the one way of expressing our belief in our Father in heaven; but this highness, good-

ness and kindness is like what we have seen and heard of in the world.—*Dean Stanley*.

THE WIDOW'S INVESTMENT.

A lady in Scotland, whose husband had left her a competence, had two profligate sons who wasted her substance in riotous living. When she saw that her property was being squandered, she determined to make an offering to the Lord. She took twenty pounds (\$100) and gave it to the Foreign Missionary Society. Her sons were very angry at this, and told her that she might just as well cast her money into the sea. "I will cast it into the sea," she replied, "and it shall be my bread upon the waters." The sons, having spent all they could get, enlisted in a regiment and were sent to India. Their positions were far apart, but God so ordered in his providence that both were stationed near the missionaries. The elder one was led to repent of sin and embrace Christ. He shortly afterward died. Meanwhile the widowed mother was praying for her boys. One evening, as she was taking down her family Bible to read, the door softly opened, and the younger son appeared to greet the aged mother. He told her he had turned to God, and Christ had blotted out all his sins. Then he narrated his past history in connection with the influence the missionaries of the cross had on his own mind, while his mother, with tears of overflowing gratitude, exclaimed, "Oh, my twenty pounds! my twenty pounds! I have cast my bread upon the waters, and now I have found it after many days."—*Christian Herald*.

FALLING INTO THE PIT.

As long ago as the time of Solomon, it was observed that he who dug a pit for another, was likely to fall into it. And the Germans have an expressive proverb, "He that takes soup with the devil must have a long spoon." We need no more apt illustration of this than can be found in the terrible mortality which attends dealers in strong drink, as a class. So exceptionally great is the death-rate among them that some Life Insurance Companies have utterly refused to insure them at any price. Dr. James Edmunds says:

"Some years ago, a number of publicans, feeling annoyed at the brand which was placed upon them by various Life Assurance Companies, proposed to establish an Association among themselves, by which they thought to show that the prejudice against them, in this respect, was unfounded. The Society was established, and called the Monarch Life Assurance Association.

"Now what was the fact? The Society was only in existence five or six years, and then it became insolvent. Other societies which impose an extra rate of payment upon drunkards, and gave exceptional advances to abstainers, showed large profits. From the blue books from the year 1853 to 1860 inclusive, it would be found that if they took carpenters, brick-layers, and ordinary working men, seventeen out of every thousand die during the year; if they took publicans, the deaths were thirty in every thousand, per year."

From this it appears that the death-rate among liquor dealers, who live an easy life, and whose exposure to weather, accidents, etc., is much less than that of ordinary laborers, is, nevertheless, nearly twice as large as the death-rate among ordinary honest, toiling people.

A man who has an offer of a position as bar-tender will do well to note this fact. "For what shall I profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own life?" If a man counts his life worth anything he had better keep out of the rum business. If he wants to die, let him sell strong drink; and he will be pretty sure to fall into the pit that he digs for his neighbor, and learn by experience that he who handles the devil's money, may expect the Lord's curse.

OUR MOMENTS.

When we take a wide sweep we are so apt to be vague. When we are aiming at generalities we do not hit the practicalities. We forget that faithfulness to principle is only proved by faithfulness in detail. Has not this vagueness had something to do with the constant ineffectiveness of our feeble desire that our time should be devoted to God?

In things spiritual the greater does not always include the less, but, paradoxically, the less more often includes the greater. So in this case, something is entrusted to us to be traded with for the Lord. But we cannot grasp it as a whole. We

instinctively break it up ere we can deal with it for any purpose. So when a new year comes round we commit it with special earnestness to the Lord. But as we do so, are we not conscious of a feeling that even a year is too much for us to deal with? And does not this feeling that we are dealing with a larger thing than we can grasp take away from the sense of reality? Thus we are brought to a more manageable measure; and as the Sunday mornings, or the Monday mornings, come round, we thankfully commit the opening week to Him, and the sense of help and rest is renewed and strengthened. But not even the six or seven days are close enough to our hand; even tomorrow exceeds our tiny grasp, and even to-morrow's grace is therefore not given to us. So we find the need of considering our lives as a matter of day by day, and that any more general (committal and consecration of our time does not meet the case so truly. Here we have found much comfort and help, and if results have not been entirely satisfactory they have, at least, been more so than before we reached this point of sublimation.

But if we have found hope and blessing by going to a certain distance in one direction, is it not probable we shall find more if we go farther in the same? And so, if we may commit the days to our Lord, why not the hours; and why not the moments? And may we not expect a fresh and special blessing in so doing?

We do not realize the importance of moments. Only let us consider those two sayings of God about them: "In a moment shall they die," and "We shall all be changed in a moment," and we shall think less lightly of them. Eternal issues may hang upon any of them, but it has come and gone before we can even think about it. Nothing seems less within the possibility of our own keeping, yet nothing is more inclusive of all other keeping. Therefore let us ask Him to keep them for us.

Are they not the tiny joints of the harness through which the darts of temptation pierce us? Only give us time, we think, and we should not be overcome. Only give us time, and we could pray and resist, and the devil would flee from us! But he comes all in a moment; and in a moment—an unguarded, unkept one—we utter the hasty or exaggerated word, or think the unchristianlike thought, or feel the unchristianlike impatience or resentment.

But even if we have gone so far as to say, "Take my moments," have we gone the step further, and really let Him take them? It is no good saying, "Take," when we do not let go. How can another keep that which we are keeping hold of? So let us, with full trust in His power, first commit these slippery moments to Him—put them right into His hand—and then we may trustfully and happily say, "Lord, keep them for me! Keep every one of the quick series as it arises. I cannot keep them for thee; do thou keep them for Thyself!"—*Anonymous*.

CHRISTMAS.

What shall I give to thee, O Lord?
The kings that came of old
Laid softly on thy cradle rude
Their myrrh, and gems, and gold.

Thy martyrs gave their hearts' warm blood;
Their ashes strewn thy way;
They spurned their lives as dreams and dust
To speed thy coming day.

We offer thee no life nor death;
We offer to thee man we give;
Dear Lord, on this thy day of birth
O, what dost thou receive?

Thou knowest of sweet and precious things
My store is scant and small;
Yet wert thou here to wait and woo,
Lord, I would give thee all!

Show me thyself in flesh once more;
Thy feast I long to spread;
To bring the water for thy feet,
The ointment for thy head.

There came a voice from heavenly heights;
"Unclose thine eyes and see,
Gifts to the least of these I love
Thou givest unto me."—*Rose Terry Cooke*.

ALL OR NONE.

We had listened together to a solemn sermon—my young friend and I—and as we walked homeward, I said to him:

"Why is it that you cannot be convinced, and become a Christian?"

"Oh," he replied gaily, "I am convinced. There's nothing the matter with my head; the difficulty is with my heart. I don't want to be one—at least, not yet. I have ambitious plans for life which it would be very bitter for me to forego, and I would have to forego them if I became a Christian."

"Why so?"

"Because it is not my nature to halve things. It must be all or none, with me. Now, if I became a Christian—I don't mean one of

your mere professors, but an out-and-out follower of Christ—I could see no stopping-place between that and becoming a minister; and a minister I will not be! It would be to abandon the cherished ideas of a life time. The traditions of my family lead me into politics, and there I must find my arena—not in the narrowness of the pulpit.

After some urgency on my part, we separated, and this peculiar subject was never renewed between us again.

Years passed away, and the same friend and I met at a large social gathering. After a little desultory talk he suddenly and somewhat bitterly turned to me:

"Do you know I am a disappointed and thwarted man?"

I expressed my surprise.

"Yes," said he, "all paths in life seem closed to me. You know with what high hopes I began my career which was to end in noble statesmanship. The fortunes of war soon put an end to that. Then I sought military distinctions, and threw myself with all my soul into the terrible struggle. My health was utterly wrecked before I had seen one year of service. I turned, after the close of the war, to literature—my education at least remained to me; and that hope has collapsed of late, and you see me now, a thwarted and broken-spirited man."

My thoughts went back to the deliberate choice that that brilliant mind had made on that well-remembered Sabbath night. I wondered if my friend's did the same; if it did, he gave no sign.

Only a few years went by, and in silence and sorrow my friend went out of life, into the great hereafter. Whether the heart that had so long held out, despite the conviction of the head, yielded at last, who dare say? If it did, he left no record of it.—*Christian Observer*.

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Mother, wash me clean to-night,
Wash my little hands all white;
Lay in curls my soft crown hair,
See my cheeks are rosy fair.
Make me pure and sweet to sight,
For the Christ-Child comes to-night.

Wash me clean from head to feet,
Snowy nightdress, fresh and sweet,
I will say my prayer and rest,
With my hands crossed on my breast,
Perhaps the Christ-Child, on his way,
By my little bed will stay.

Mother, pardon me, I ask,
Naughty words and slighted task;
Let me go to bed to-night,
Pure and sweet and snowy white.
Then the Christ-Child, on his way,
By my little bed may stay.

HARRY'S CHRISTMAS.

It takes but a few strokes of the artist's pencil to picture the desolation and wretchedness of the drunkard's home. There are the bare walls, through whose crevices the winter wind drifts the snow, and piles it in little heaps across the fireless hearth; there are the few broken chairs, the leafless table, upon which no other food except a few potatoes or a scanty loaf ever finds its way; there are the children shivering, with half-clad bodies, quarreling perhaps over the last remaining crust. The pale-faced wife is waiting with trembling the coming of him whose step was once hailed with delight. It is a sad picture, but not overdrawn; it is too true to life.

But this is only the result of a few rapid strokes of the artist's brush. Who can describe the heart-ache of the young wife when she first meets her husband reeling home in a state of intoxication, and so on day after day and week after week, until all hope has well-nigh fled? Can we know the hunger of the little ones, who have cried for bread when not a crust had the mother to give? This is beyond our skill; none but our Heavenly Father, who heareth every cry of distress, will know the real wretchedness of the drunkard's home.

It was such a home as this in which Harry Marsten lived with his two sisters. They were the unfortunate children of a father who regarded not their tears, but spent for rum the money that should have clothed and fed them. Harry was eight years old, and aided his mother and sisters, as many a child of twice his years would not have attempted. Their wretched home was in a dirty and obscure street in a large city, and the only outlook from the dingy window was upon scenes of distress as great as their own. Harry was a newsboy, and every morning, no matter how cold, would tie his ragged comforter about his neck, shuffle on a pair of shoes three times too large for him and full of holes, and drawing his scanty clothes closer around him, would hurry down to the office for his morning

supply of papers; after which he would be found on the busy street crying his old song of "Papers—morning papers!" while he would shift the bundle from one arm to the other to better warm the blue fingers in his pockets.

It was the day before Christmas, and Harry had hoped, by saving his pennies, to buy something for their dinner the next day. He had risen early that morning before the great city was astir, and tiptoed past his father, who lay drunk on the floor, and started out to begin his day's work. It was a busy day for him, and more than one bright nickel found its way to his pocket. Evening found his bundle of papers all sold, and he found he had nearly two dollars. O how proudly he turned to go home, feeling rich with his little store. He had not gone far when a rough voice he knew too well, accompanied by a shake, brought him to a sudden stop.

"See here, boy, have ye any money?"

Poor Harry! Here was an end to his plans. The tears filled his eyes as he vainly tried to slip from the vice-like grasp of his father.

"Come—none of yer whimpering; fork it over! I must have it!"

"Father!" began he, "I haven't much, and I was going to get something for dinner, so we can have Christmas again as we used to."

"Christmas be bothered! I want it," and with these heartless words he emptied the little pocket and staggered away, leaving his boy penniless and well-nigh heart-broken. Sadly he walked towards the hotel called home, and lifting the latch entered, and going directly to his mother, buried his face in her lap and sobbed.

"Mother, it's no use trying. I can't do any thing nor have any thing but it must all go for whiskey," and the tears flowed afresh as he told her the whole story.

Softly the mother smoothed the tumbled hair, while she tried to comfort him in his great sorrow. Poor mother! hope had long since died in her heart, but she lived in her boy—he was her sole support.

Twilight deepened into night, and after eating his scanty meal he crept away to bed with such a heavy heart as none but a drunkard's child can know.

Let us follow the wretched father to the haunt of sin. Entering the door he immediately walked to the counter, when his attention was arrested by a conversation between the landlord and his wife concerning the dinner next day, for which great preparations were being made. For the first time in years his deadened conscience gave a throb of remorse, as he thought of the family at home with nothing to eat on the coming day, while his money went to help load the table of the whisky-seller with luxuries. Putting the money back in his pocket he turned into the street and walked rapidly on, not knowing whither he went. A great conflict was going on in his mind, but the good angel triumphed, and an hour later found him on his way to his own home with bundles for the Christmas dinner such as had not found their way to his dwelling for years.

Harry was awakened next morning by the bells ringing out on the frosty air, "Peace on earth, good will to men." Hastily dressing he found, to his great surprise, his father sober and kindling a fire in the broken stove, while his little sisters were eagerly devouring such rosy apples as he had wished for them. The day was like a dream to Harry. The father, although restless, had remained at home, not daring to trust himself in reach of the old temptation. When evening came he started out but soon returned, and tossing a paper into his wife's lap, sat down and wept like a child. Catching the paper from his mother's hands, Harry read, "Temperance Pledge," and his father's name in bold letters at the bottom. Clapping his hands, he danced for joy, shouting:

"O, this is merry Christmas, mother; this is 'Peace on earth' to us. Good bye to cold and hunger now; father's signed the pledge!" and in his childish enthusiasm he caught his father round the neck and pressed a kiss on the poor man's lips. Lifting his face toward his wife, the penitent father, with choking voice, exclaimed:

"Wife! children! so help me God, I'll never, never touch rum again, and from this Christmas-day I'll be a better man," and he kept his word.

Harry and his two sisters were sent to school, and through many years, peace and prosperity smiled on that once desolate home.—*West-Ad.*