

FAMILY DEPARTMENT.

CHRISTMAS HYMN.

BY THE REV. J. ANKETEL.

What led Thee, gentle Jesus,
To leave Thy home on high?
From sorrow to release us,
Why wert Thou born to die?
Thy love, all thought excelling,
Hath drawn Thee from above;
Our love shall seek Thy dwelling,
Lord Jesu, God of Love!

Dear soul, thy Lord immortal!
Stands knocking at the door!
Throw open every portal,
And bid Him wait no more;
With joyful love receive Him,
Trust in His faithful Word,
Nor e'er in tolly leave Him,
Thy Spouse, thy King, thy Lord!

Haste, haste, throughout all nations
The joyful news proclaim;
To coming generations
Exult Messiah's Name;
And let fair Sion's daughter
Tell in her holy place,
How Love Divine has sought her—
The God of truth and grace!

Rejoice! our night of weeping
Shall soon be turned to-day,
When Christ, His promise keeping,
Shall bear our souls away.
There shall we reign forever,
With palms and robes of white,
And naught our souls shall sever
From Christ, our souls' delight!

HOLLY LEAVES.

A TALE FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

[Continued.]

A little girl was at her side, a poor, ragged, squalid-looking thing, with a thin pinched face, and straggling, brown locks hanging over her dark face; in her hand she held a little twig upon which five or six miserable holly leaves were growing: how tenderly the child guarded it from the crowd, how lovingly she held it as though it was some precious thing, whilst at her side was a little crippled boy, so like her in feature and poverty and hopeless wretchedness, that none could doubt they were brother and sister.

In some unaccountable way one of the boy's crutches slipped, and the little fellow fell heavily to the ground.

There was a cry of anguish from the sister.

"Oh, Jamie, Jamie, have they killed you?"

But Jamie was not killed, only very much frightened; he looked very piteously into his sister's face, and the large tears coursed each other down his little pale cheeks.

"Don't cry, Jamie dear, I'll carry you, I can do it easy enough, if somebody would only take the crutches."

"I will," said the sweetest voice the poor girl had ever heard, and Mary Mordaunt's hand was stretched out to receive them.

"My dear, what are you about?" said her father.

"Oh, papa dear will you take Gerty home, and let Harold come with me; I must see where these poor little things live."

A year ago such a request would have been instantly refused, now, the Church's teaching, sermons like the one he had heard that night, had done their work.

A smile came over the somewhat hard, stern face as Mordaunt said, "Go, my child, and if you find they want help—and indeed poor creatures they looked as if they sorely needed

it—give them this," and she slipped some money into Mary's hand.

It was a somewhat curious procession that went out into the starry night, the child of twelve years old carrying her little ten-years-old brother so tenderly, the gentle refined girl following with the crutches, the joyous Harold walking a little apart, looking it must be confessed somewhat ashamed of the whole proceeding, but too really kind-hearted to say a word against it.

"Where do you live, my child?" said Mary.

"Down yonder in Thorp's yard, ma'am; but it's a poor place, not fit for the like of you."

Mary's courage failed her for a moment, she was almost inclined to turn back but Harold unconsciously came to the rescue.

"Hold hard," he said, "you can't carry the little fellow any longer, give him to me," and he took Jamie from his sister's arms and strode boldly on.

Then Mary heard the story of the people she was going to visit. "Father," Ruth Hayward said, "had been dead nigh upon two years; they had always lived in the country where the flowers grew so beautiful, until three years ago, then work failed, and father came to London, for he heard he could gain a power of money there; but somehow, when they got there, he couldn't breathe, he wanted to go back to the green fields again, but he had no money, and he fell very sick and then he died, and left mother alone with only herself and poor little Jamie; and now mother's sick ma'am," continued Ruth, "and she looks like father did when he lay a-dying. She sent us to church to-night so that we might pray for her there, but somehow I think she's going to father."

The poor little voice trembled, but the fast-rising tears were bravely repressed, and Mary gazed at the small frail form at her side, and felt that the spirit of a little martyr was to be found beneath all those rags and tatters.

"How do you live, my child?" she said.

"Please ma'am the ladies at the home is very kind, and so is the Vicar; I get an odd job sometimes, and God takes care of us, and don't let us starve."

A tear of compassion rolled down the cheek of the girl, who though all her life had never had one single wish ungratified, as she listened to the simple recital of utter poverty.

"You shall have a good supper to-night," she said, laying her hand upon the child's shoulder. "But tell me, Ruth, what you are going to do with that little piece of holly."

A deep blush suffused the pale face as she answered, "Please, ma'am, it's for mother, I picked it up in the porch, and I thought as now she'd like it. We used always to have it in the cottage at home. Mother was talking about it only to-day; she said she liked the holly leaves, for they seemed to tell us how Jesus Christ suffered for us."

Mary started. Here were Arthurs ideas, the Vicar's sermon, the poor child's simple words, all bearing upon the same point, all telling the same tale, all turning the joy of Christmas-ide into the membership of sorrow and suffering.

"Please, ma'am, it's here," said Ruth, turning from the dimly lighted back street into a dark narrow court, "will you come in?"

"No," said Harold, administering a kick to his sister, and depositing Jamie safely on the ground. "I don't think it's the place for you, Mary," he continued in an under-tone, and with all the dignity of an Etonian twelve years old.

"Yes, Harold, dear, I must go in; these poor things have a mother who is dying, surely we ought to feel for them, Harold; I promise not to be long, if you will wait for me."

"She won't come to no harm, sir," said Ruth with some importance. "If we but mention Mr. Vernon's name, there's not one as will dare to lay a hand on us."

So Harold kept guard at the entrance of the court, and Mary walked with the child through sights and sounds which must have been strangely repugnant to her gentle nature, into the lower room of a high house from which sounds of revelry and drunkenness proceeded.

There on a low bed lay the pale emaciated form of a woman who Mary saw at a glance was fast going to her rest.

The racking cough shook the worn-out frame, suffering was marked on every feature, poverty in its lowest form was seen on every side, but the smile was very sweet with which she greeted her children; and the voice, weak though it was, had in it a tone of welcome as she said, "My darlings, how late you are."

"Mother, here's a lady come to see you."

The poor woman raised herself with difficulty to greet her visitor. Then Mary went forward and spoke a few kind words, telling how Jamie had fallen down and been very much frightened, and how she and her brother had walked home with the children. Then giving some money to Ruth she charged her to go and buy some supper, and a bit of meat for the Christmas dinner, and with a promise to come and see them again before very long, she took her leave of Mrs. Hayward and Jamie, whilst Ruth went with her to the door. She saw the poor woman last, lying back exhausted on a pillow, holding in her hand the holly twig, gazing on the leaves earnestly, whilst a smile of hope and joy illumined the wan face; the thorns which had pierced His sacred flesh pointed the way of happiness to her, when the trials of this troublesome world should be at an end.

Mary and Harold walked through the brilliantly lighted streets to their own luxurious home. A change had come to the girl's life since she left it that evening.

She had known sorrow and affliction: the presence of the stern messenger had brought with it a grief which must be life long, but the knowledge of the misery which reigned in the world amidst those who like herself were members of Christ and heirs of a heavenly inheritance, had come to her for the first time on that Christmas Eve; the burdens of others, which, in obedience to the Divine command, we must all bear, weighed heavily upon the young, shrinking spirit.

Arthur saw that something was on her mind as once more she stood at his side after that glorious service and her visit to Ruth Hayward's home. He had heard from his father whether she and Harold had gone, and he dreamt something of the truth when he saw the troubled expression on her face.

An hour later when Mary went into her brother's room to see that he was comfortably settled for the night, he drew her to his side, and she told him the weight that had come to her, with the knowledge of her duties and responsibilities. Very long into the night, even to the dawning of the Christmas morning, the two talked on: Mary telling her doubts and fears, Arthur cheering her on with all that he himself had learnt from the Vicar.

Amongst the faithful who knelt in the solemn stillness of the early hour at the Holy Altar to commemorate God's infinite love and mercy in sending us at this glad Christmas-tide the great inestimable gift which no care nor sorrow can ever take from us, was Mary Mordaunt; and there she offered as a sacrifice all the ease and luxury of her past life, and prayed for strength to help her to bear the burdens of others and so fulfil the law of Christ.

She had need of all strength of all holy comfort ere many more months had passed, for her home was desolate, herself and her brothers fatherless. Arthur was fast going to his rest, and when he was taken from her what would her life be?

A few days after the Christmas feast she had visited that wretched room in Thorpe's Court, but poor Ruth and Jamie had been taken to the