

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL.

BY EMILIE SEARCHFIELD.

IT was Christmas morning. The air was clear and frosty, and the sun shone lovingly; while the bells—the merry, merry bells—carolled blithely, spreading the joyful tidings as far as they could. The ground was covered with snow, which, seeing as it was Christmas, was quite seasonable and right. It also seemed to remind one of the “robe of righteousness,” but then that is “whiter than snow,” and our mortal eyes can bear witness to naught more pure. Ah well, we must wait for the other!

But there was another melody going on—a sweeter music, too. Not in the lordly mansion, not by the cottage fire; it was in the poorhouse, and Granny Blake was the musician. Poor Granny! Why, she had complained of a cracked voice for at least thirty years, never dreaming that the cracked voice, dim sight, and dull hearing, as they bore her gradually away from earth and earthly things, served but to sweeten the remnants of life, so as to cause even angels to pause and listen to her words. There she lay on her tiny bed on that bright Christmas morning—for Granny had never sat up a single hour since she entered that dreary abode, which was just four years ago now. Around her stood a group of children, and Granny talked to them lovingly of the great birthday of the Lord Jesus. Everybody loved Granny, else the matron had not allowed those little ones free access to her bedside; and Granny loved everybody too, else she would never have had a longing desire to spread the Christmas melody.

There was a reason, too, why Granny loved to look on the sunny faces of the children. Years and years ago, when she was young, just such a sunny face had looked up into hers, and a sweet little voice had called her “Mother”—ah, but it was all so long, long ago! And since then Ned had gone to the bad, and Granny had come here to end her days. She had never thought to have done so—not in those days of bright, joyous hope; but then we never know what awaits us in the future! She had heard naught of Ned since he was transported some fourteen years back. Some said that he was not guilty of the offence which had sent him over the water, only that he had been so mixed up in the affair that it was hard to judge. Granny said never a word this way or that, only went on as before praying, praying, praying to the great God to have mercy, and had her Ned right at the last.

The Christmas sun had gone down; only a fiery glow remained to tell of his glorious reign. But another Sun was shedding bright beams in Granny's room, even the “Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings.” Outwardly it was grey and still, with only an occasional moonbeam flickering through the curtainless window, revealing a bit or two of holly which loving hands had placed where Granny could see them, the old woman herself sleeping peacefully on her bed, and two dark shadows, who seemed to be watching the quiet sleeper. By-and-by Granny awoke; then one of the shadows shuffled quickly away into a corner of the room where the grey light did not fall, and when a moonbeam flickered by the bed there was only the nurse bending over it—the nurse who had kindly managed to have Granny placed in a little room all to herself, because—well, because ‘Granny was good and loved by all.

“I heard some one move away. Have I been ill?” Granny's voice was very patient and resigned. Many a time had she awoke to find that a sudden faintness had frightened her kind friends, and that the doctor had sent her to sleep with his never-failing power, for nature to recruit her wasted strength. She thought now that it was the same, and fancied it was the doctor who had moved from her side.

“Granny,” said the nurse gently, “Granny, it is Christmas Day as you know, and God has been very good to you.” She paused, and Granny took up the word.

“Yes, yes, always good. Good in sending me you to be kind to me, and good in giving me another Christmas Day at all.”

“Yes, but Granny,” and the nurse's voice seemed full of deep, tender feeling; “God has sent you a better Christmas joy than you can ever dream of.”

The clouds cleared away just then, and the moon shone out, revealing everything in the room—Granny's face quivering with hope, the gentle, womanly face of the nurse, and

another—a dark, bearded man, he who had crept away into the shadowy corner.

“Oh! there's a letter from—from—” Granny's voice failed her, for the nurse's words had stirred the very depths of her soul.

Then the bearded man came forward, and with a low cry fell upon his knees, and rested his head where it had so often lain before, on his mother's breast.

“It is Ned! Ned! my own Ned!” and fondly the aged fingers stroked the dark, crisp locks on that bowed head. Oh, it was touching to watch them! So touching that the nurse wept—she hurried away to fetch a light. They were still there when she returned, only Granny's fingers were quite still, and her face white as though she slept the long sleep of death. The nurse touched Ned's arm and he looked up.

“I have killed her—my good, patient mother!” he cried bitterly; but when the doctor, who chanced to be in the house, came and looked upon her, he said it was but one of the old attacks.

The usual remedies were applied, but they failed to produce sleep as heretofore, so when Granny came to herself, she opened her eyes at once upon her great Christmas joy. The doctor felt her pulse, and then beckoned the nurse from the room.

“Sinking fast,” he said gravely. “Is that the son come home again?” (for he knew all about Ned).

“Yes; it was his coming which brought on the fainting fit.”

“Ah, well! let him stay by her all the night, if she wishes it; nothing can hurt her; she won't live till morning though!” and so saying, he hurried away to his own home.

All through the long, dark hours Ned sat with that feeble hand grasping his, the while he poured into that strained, anxious ear the tale of days that were gone by for ever; and the fluttering heart thanked God, for the Christmas carol had been going on for Ned even in that distant land. He said that it was his mother's prayers and God's mercy which had wrought the change in him, and now for years past he had been spreading “the old, old story” by both life and word, and “please God,” as he said, “he would go on as he had begun.” Once and again he had written, but the letters must have been lost, and now, a free and happy man, he had come to gladden his mother's heart and make her happy too. Ah, yes; but he little knew how near she was to eternal joy! Nevertheless, when the grey dawn appeared the dull ears had ceased to listen and the heart to throb, and Ned was once more alone.

Another Christmas, and Ned stands in the old church, and by his side a gentle woman whom he calls wife; another and another Great Birthday will, in succession, come and go, little children's voices will echo around his table and Granny's carol will still go on, for Ned and his wife are praying people, whose lives are daily praises to the One who came to this earth and lived and suffered for us.

Such lives are Christmas carols! Will your mothers cease to spread the blessed strains? Will you not rather like Granny pray for those near and dear to you, living to God yourself, and making melody for others. Then in the end Granny's reward will be yours, and the carol—your life story—shall still swell on through other lives, making music both in TIME and ETERNITY.

“Then, when in scenes of glory,
You sing the New, New Song,
‘Twill be the Old, Old Story
That you have loved so long.”

MARIAN'S LOVE.

IN that most interesting and useful book, entitled, “Mister Horn and his Friends,” the Rev. M. G. Pearse relates a beautifully touching incident, showing the depth of love that even a little child may show for Jesus. After a powerful homily by Mister Horn on the blessedness of giving to the Lord, the author goes on to say:—

Little did any think that within a week of that Sunday morning Mr. Horn's sermon would come to the mind of one of the hearers with a new meaning and a force as if every word of it had been on fire, and had burnt its way right to his heart. That one was James Niggardly himself.

Of Mr. Niggardly's three daughters, the youngest was