

PLEASANT HOURS.

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

VOL. XVII.]

TORONTO, DECEMBER 18, 1897.

[No. 51.]

Christmas.

BY PHILLIPS BROOKS.

The earth has grown old with its burden of care,
But at Christmas it always is young.
The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair,
And its soul full of music breaks forth on the air,
When the song of the angels is sung.
It is coming, Old Earth, it is coming to-night!
On the snowflakes which cover the sod
The feet of the Christ-child fall gentle and white,
And the voice of the Christ-child tells out with delight,
That mankind are the children of God.
On the sad and the lonely, the wretched and poor,
That voice of the Christ-child shall fall,
And to every blind wanderer opens the door
Of a hope that he dared not to dream of before,
With a sunshine of welcome for all.
The feet of the humblest may walk in the field,
Where the feet of the holiest have trod,
This, this is the marvel to mortals revealed
When the silvery trumpets of Christmas have pealed,
That mankind are the children of God.

CHRISTMAS STORIES.

"A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year! young folks," said the cheery voice of Mr. Spinner. "Surely it is wise to commemorate the coming of the Christ-child with rejoicings. In the Middle Ages many legends were believed about his appearing to men in the form of a child. The story of St. Christopher is one of these. Let me tell it to you: Christopher, the legend says, was a giant of great height and strength and of terrible aspect. He was proud of his power, and determined to serve no one but the greatest King on earth. So, selecting the monarch with the widest dominions, he went to him and offered his services. The King, delighted with Christopher's stature and strength, gladly found a place for him.

Before long a minstrel came to the court, and sang a ballad in which was frequent mention of the name of Satan Christopher, who stood beside the King, saw with wonder that every time this name recurred the monarch crossed himself. He asked the meaning of this gesture, but the King would not answer. The giant then threatened to leave the court, and the King, thus constrained, said he made the sign of the cross to avert the power of Satan, who otherwise would slay him. Then, said Christopher, 'I go to serve this Satan; for if thou fear him, he is greater than thou art.'

"So the giant departed, and travelled great distances in every direction, searching for the Evil One. After a long time he came upon a band of armed men, whose leader had a horrible visage. 'Whom seekest thou?' said he. 'I look for Satan, the greatest prince on earth,' returned Christopher. 'Join my band,' said the leader, 'for I am that prince.' But soon Christopher found that the Prince of Darkness, for all his boasted valour, trembled violently when he neared a cross by the wayside, and took a long circuit to avoid it. 'Why dost thou do so?' said Christopher in great surprise. At first the giant could get no answer, but when the threat was made to leave his service, Satan replied: 'Upon the cross died Christ Jesus, and when I behold it I must tremble and fly, for I fear him.' 'There is, then, a greater prince than thou!' exclaimed the astonished Christopher. 'Him will I serve, and no other!'

"So the giant again travelled far and wide, in his search for a master. After many days he came upon the call of a holy hermit. To him Christopher said: 'Shew me the way to serve Christ Jesus, who is the greatest Prince of heaven and

earth.' 'Thou must fast and pray,' said the hermit. 'No, no,' replied Christopher, 'for by fasting I would lose my strength, and I know nothing of prayers.'

"Then, after much thought, the hermit spoke again: 'Yonder rolls a river so turbulent and strong that every year many who strive to cross it are overcome and lost beneath its waves. Go thou to its banks, and stand ready with thy mighty strength to help the feeble passengers across. Thy efforts may prove acceptable to Christ, whom thou desirest to serve.' 'This work pleaseth me well,' said Christopher, who immediately re-

without success. A third time the cry, a child's wall, reached the sleeping giant. He seized his staff, and this time found a little child on the river bank, who stretched out his arms and said, 'Christopher, carry me over this night.' Now, it was a terrible night, the winds howled and the waves roared and lashed in fury on the beach; but Christopher took the child on his shoulder and plunged boldly in. The violence of the storm increased, waves mountains high dashed against the brave giant, and the weight of the child became so enormous that time and again he nearly fell, to be

shoulder. For proof of this strike thy palm-staff into the earth.' This Christopher did, and to his amazement the dried stick shot out branches, flowers, and leaves, and became a flourishing palm-tree. Then Christopher acknowledged his Master, and falling on his knees, worshipped Christ."

ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

BY ELIZABETH FERGOUSON SEA.

The first dwellers of the Rhine and the north of Europe were heathen peoples. They believed there were gods up in Walhalla, and that they must find some mediator in order to communicate with them. So they chose trees, probably because the roots touched the dark earth upon which they lived, and the branches extended upward toward the supposed dwelling-place of these gods.

Every person had his own tree, under whose boughs he dwelt continually. Whenever a child was born a tree was planted for him, to be his companion and counsellor, and he was taught to keep it free from insects, parasites, and other enemies both of the trunk and roots. When the wind moaned through the branches, he believed it to be a message from the gods, and listened attentively. When a number of trees were planted near together, the group represented a family. The pruning and other care lavished upon the tree constituted its worship. On feast days gifts of food and flowers were hung upon its branches. If a child's tree died, it was considered a sad omen, and his own life was believed to be near its close. If the child died first he was buried under his tree. Sometimes when a man died, his tree was cut down and the trunk hollowed out to admit his corpse, and then, in this strange coffin, he was set afloat on the waters of the Rhine to sail down to the ocean.

How fearful must have seemed this silent passenger passing out alone to the sea!

In 1560 some labourers examining a part of the Oyder Zee found at a great depth some of these tree trunks, well-preserved and nearly petrified bearing still the bones of their former occupants.

Far up in Scandinavia via the wild Norsemen loved best of all the evergreen ash about which they had strange fancies. They talked about a world tree named Yggdrasil, whose branches stretched through the whole earth whose roots went down very deep to hell and whose topmost branches reached up to Walhalla. Up in the branches was perched an eagle while among its roots was a serpent gnawing away at the life of the tree. A squirrel ran about in its branches, trying to make peace between the eagle and the serpent, which were always at strife.

The German sacred tree was a pine, about which they had a song beginning:

"O pine tree green, O pine tree green,
Thy foliage fadeth never;
Green in the summer heat, and seen
As green in snowy weather."

By-and-bye these heathen people became Christianized, and learned of the cross, which is sometimes called "a tree." They brought their loved trees into their new religion, and instead of an eagle placed upon its topmost boughs an image of the Christ, or a dove, and hung lights upon its branches, because he was the "Light of the World," and so it became a "Christmas tree."

But instead of hanging gifts for the Christ, whose birthday they kept, upon the tree, they hung gifts for each other, a fashion we follow now even in our Sunday-schools and homes.

How may we hang gifts for Christ upon the branches of our Christmas trees? By placing them there for his poor, neglected, and sorrowing ones, for he says such gifts are given to him.

"And so, not only for Christmas,
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others,
Is the joy that comes back to you."



CHRISTMAS MORNING AT THE MANOR HOUSE, ENGLAND.

In the Snow.

BY LUCY LARCOM.

I heard a bird chirp in the sun;
He flutters and hops to and fro;
His tiny light tracks, one by one,
He prints on the new-fallen snow.
Little bird, sing!
Sun, give his wing
A flicker of gold as you go!
Make a smooth path for him, Snow!

I see a child out there at play;
His footfall is light on the snow;
His curls catch a swift, golden ray
Of the sun, while the merry winds blow,

Little child, run!
Shine on him, Sun!
Blow him, fair weather, Wind, blow!
Make a white path for him, Snow!

The little bird's home is the sky,
Or the ground, or a nest in the tree,
The little child some day will fly
From his doorstep, new regions to see.
Birdlike and free
May his sunny flight be!
And wherever on earth he may go
May his footsteps be whiter than snow!

paired to the river-bank, only stopping on the way to pull up a palm-tree by the roots—so great was his strength—for a staff. He built a hut of boughs on the bank, and was over ready, by day or night, to help those who desired to cross over. The strong he supported by his enormous strength, and he carried the feeble on his shoulders.

"One night, while sleeping in the hut, a plaintive cry of 'Christopher, carry me over,' reached him. Christopher ran to the river edge, but could see no one. Yet no sooner did he fall asleep than again the cry came. Christopher once more started up and searched, but again

swallowed up by the waves. But he looked up with wonder at the beaming face of the child, revealed by flashes in the sky, and struggled on, supporting himself when almost sinking, on his palm-staff.

"At length the opposite bank was reached, where he gently placed his charge. 'Who art thou,' said he, 'that hath almost borne me down? Had I carried the whole world it had not been heavier.' Then the child said: 'Wonder not, Christopher; me wouldst thou serve, and I have accepted thy service. Thou hast not only borne the world, but him that made the world, upon thy