

MAKING CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

HERE'S a subtle air of mystery about the house to-day: There are whisperings and hidings, but not in merry play; There's a sound of shutting boxes; there's a noise of scampering feet, Then the children come with sober steps, with faces grave and sweet.

There are breakings-up of savings-banks, odd pennies from papa; There are earnest consultations with aunty and mamma; There are calls for scraps of satin, skeins of zephyr, shreds of floss, There are searchings in thick folios for autumn leaves and moss.

The artists, too, are busy painting horse-shoes, tiles and shells; I hear half-whispered comments, "Those lovely lily-bells," "What colour is a jessamine?" "I want a lighter blue," "I think I'd put a darker shade in that if I were you."

What quiet all the busy tongues? they hardly dare reply To the simplest of questions, but hesitate and try To be strictly non-committal. "Hush-sh-sh! be careful now, don't tell." There are smiles and words half spoken, but they keep their secrets well.

Lo! the mystery's unravelled, for upon the Christmas tree, By the light of coloured tapers, fair and beautiful to see, Books and statues, toys and vases, but the dearest gifts of all Are the work of tiny fingers, planned and made by children small.

See! cushions, book-marks, pen-wipers, of every size and sort, And what if grandma's footstool has a leg a trifle short? It is covered with a patch-work of a very crazy kind, And the rick-rack's very crooked—well! they tell me love is blind.

Here are lovely glowing pictures; can it be the leaves and fern That we gathered in the Autumn to such gems of art could turn? Those "coloured outlines" might not do for the French Academy, But they hold the place of honour upon our Christmas tree.

No diamonds ever shone as bright as mother's eyes to-night, And no gifts with money purchased could give such rare delight? Though the stitches were uneven and the blunders not a few, We only see the perfect work our darlings tried to do.

—Kate Lawrence.

A LITTLE SANTA CLAUS.

HE was like a "jumping-jack," only he had a bright face, full of thought, such as no jumping-jack could possibly have.

His bare hands were tucked away in the pockets of his patched and almost worn-out trousers. Although the cold wind made his little nose quite red, he did not seem to mind it; for he kept dancing back and forth, jumping first on one foot then on the other, before the shop window, and repeating over and over—"Ten cents for Polly, and ten cents for Johnny, and twenty cents for mother!"

The crowds of people, all in a hurry, and full of the Christmas joy, passed by, sometimes pushing against him, and sometimes hiding him away from the window and the pretty toys inside. Merry boys went along in little groups, dressed in warm overcoats and mittens, whistling and laughing, but none could show a happier face than his. And sometimes they half stopped to wonder at him, as he hopped up and down on the side-walk, and kept up an eager

search with his eyes among the tempting Christmas toys. But he did not notice it. He only repeated—"Ten cents for Polly, ten cents for Johnny, and twenty cents for mother!" and thought his own happy little thoughts.

For a great many weeks he had been saving up his pennies; they were very scarce, and he worked hard to earn them. And it was cold weather; and it took a good many of the pennies to keep the one fire at home to make them all warm—"Polly, and Johnny, and mother," and little Nicholas himself. Yet he had managed to save a few—one here, and another there, until his pocket jingled pleasantly that afternoon as he put his hand in it and jumped up and down before the gay window.

Was't it funny that his name should be *Nicholas*? He thought so. Some one in the mission school had told him the story of "St. Nicholas," the friend of all boys and girls: the wonderful Saint Nicholas, who did so many kind deeds for those who were poor or in trouble.

"And now I shall be a St. Nicholas myself," he said, laughing softly, as he jingled his pennies; "a real Santa Claus! and give them all a nice surprise—ten cents for Polly, and ten cents for Johnny, and twenty cents for mother."

He could not decide what to buy, and that was why he stood in front of the window so long. A few doors back, at the baker's, he thought he had seen something for mother; but here, among the toys, he was quite puzzled.

You all know how pleasant it is to puzzle and think over such things; and so you may understand that Nicholas did not mind.

But it was getting nearly dark now, and the lamps were being lighted, so he must hurry.

All the streets were bright and busy, Everybody was joyful at the Christmas time. Several girls came along, singing softly, as they never would have thought of doing at any other time:—

"Christ was born on Christmas Day,
Wreath the holly, twine the bay."

They had been practising their carols with the Sunday-school children; and how glad they looked, thinking of all the pleasant things that come with this dear Christmas-time! The church, so bright and sweet with its evergreen decorations; the kind faces of teachers and friends, who kept wonderful secrets; and the beautiful tree, with its lights and gifts; and the happy music, all about "peace and good-will," like the song the angels sang so long ago.

"Annie, do see that little fellow! Isn't he funny!"

They had come up to where Nicholas stood, repeating his little calculation.

"What is he saying? Isn't that a pretty doll!"

One of them went nearer, trying to hear what this little fellow with the bright face was saying.

"Oh, come, Kitty! You'll get something prettier than that to-morrow, I expect."

Then they all turned to cross the street. And for a moment the small St. Nicholas forgot his own affairs as he watched them, and even followed, unconsciously, to the curb-store.

Only for a moment. It was such a moment as never came in any of their lives again!

The smallest of the girls, looking carelessly back, and humming a carol to herself, did not see the two great

horses and the heavy truck close upon her.

Perhaps the driver did not see her, either; she was so small, and the street was so crowded. But Nicholas did, and quick as a thought he had sprung toward her with a shout and caught the horses' heads. Such a little fellow to think he could stop those great horses! He only put himself there in front of her; and in that instant's check she had stepped beyond the danger. But he was thrown down, and one heavy wheel passed over him.

That was all; but it was the end of the Christmas calculations "for Polly and Johnny and mother."

There was a great crowd, and strong arms carried the brave St. Nicholas away from the street to see what could be done for him.

And in the crowd appeared the little girl's father, and he took her up, and there were tears on his cheeks; and she cried too, and hid her face in his arms, and said:—

"Oh, papa, he saved me! that little boy!"

They sent for a doctor; but when he came he shook his head and said that nothing could be done.

The "Christ-Child," was at the door, and Nicholas was going away with him. There could not be a better Christmas for him than that, could there?

The girls gathered around him, and just once he opened his eyes, and, looking at Kitty, said:—

"It's in my pocket. Will you buy them for Polly and"—Then his voice failed.

"Oh, yes, I will! I will buy something for them all!"

And so they did—she and her grateful father. Never had there been such generous Christmas gifts in that poor home before. Never had "Polly and Johnny and mother" had such comfort and such kind attention. But nothing could give them back little Nicholas again, and their hearts were very, very sad that Christmas eve.

The next night, when the lights had burned out on the tree, and the carols were all sung, and Kitty was going home, safe and well, with her father, she said:—

"Papa, I know I love Jesus now. I'm sure of it, ever since last night. It was all that brave little boy. And I want to see him again some day, and tell him. I hope I shall. I know I shall!"

And so, you see, he was really a little St. Nicholas, after all, helping to bring the very best gift—the true Christmas gift—to Kitty's heart, to make her whole life glad and good.

HELPING POOR SCHOOLS.

WE have received the following letter from a little lad of nine:—"Dear Dr. Withrow,—Some time ago I was very ill with a fever, and when I was getting better my ma read me a story out of one of your Sunday-school papers, about a little girl that had collected among her friends a lot of books for poor Sunday-schools. After I got well I thought I would see if I could collect some also, so when I went to school again, I had our teacher ask the scholars to bring all the books they could spare to our house on the next Saturday. A few of the scholars came and brought quite a number of books, and my pa procured for me the old library from the Sunday-school

here, so I have boxed them all up and pa has sent them by express to your address to-day. Please distribute them to poor schools that are not able to buy books for themselves.

"We have a good Sunday-school here and take all the papers published at the Book-rooms. We read them all every week, and like them very much. We have a good day-school here also, and a splendid teacher, whom we all like very much; he teaches in the Sunday-school too."

[God bless the dear boy. We hope he will live long to be a worker in the Church of God. We would give his name and address but that we have not received permission.—Ed.]

BETTER BE SURE THAN SORRY.

"BETTER be sure than sorry!" said a garden-worker, when his employer expressed a doubt whether it was necessary to cover a certain vegetation to protect it from the frost. "Better be sure than sorry!"

A man who is not sure is very likely to be sorry. He who takes things on trust will be quite likely to be cheated and disappointed at last. The business man who treads in uncertain paths, who is not sure of his course, is very likely to be sorry he has taken it.

Keep on the safe side. Be sure rather than sorry. Do not give yourself the benefit of every doubt. Be lenient to others' faults, but strict regarding your own. If there be an act which in your own mind is doubtful or questionable in its character, take the course of wisdom and prudence. It would be a terrible thing to be mistaken in the final day; it is better to be sure here than to be sorry at the judgment seat of Christ.

THE COW TREE.

NATURE has few more remarkable sights for the traveller than that of a tree yielding an ample supply of milk superior to that drawn from the cow. It is in Venezuela that this remarkable tree may be found. There amid the forest it grows to a height of from forty five to sixty feet. Every morning the Indians go out with vessels, make deep cuts in the bark, and collect the white, creamy fluid, which runs from the wound. Men and women, fed largely upon this vegetable milk, grow fat, and children drink it eagerly.

DR. T. L. FLOOD in *The Chautauquan*, for December, discusses the methods of the Four Champions of Temperance now at work in America, and adds: "We believe them to represent the temperance principles and methods which must win in the second century of this great reform,—John B. Gough, Francis Murphy, Neal Dow, and Frances E. Willard."

ONE of the special attractions of our Sunday-school papers, for 1886, will be missionary articles, with numerous pictures, on Japan, by the Rev. Dr. Meacham, late missionary in that country, and missionary letters by Rev. T. Crosby, British Columbia, and other missionary heroes who are fighting the battle of the cross on the high places of the field.