

Claus in Africa, but they do need the story of the Christ-child, throughout the great dark continent which nineteen centuries ago opened its gates to receive the infant Saviour escaping into Egypt from the hate of the cruel king.

SMYRNA.

The true secret of a happy Christmas has come to the girls of Smyrna, and with this name comes the echo from the Revelation, "I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich." Rich, indeed, are these beautiful girls of the church in Smyrna to-day, as they decide that instead of Christmas gifts for themselves their whole effort shall go into making a blessed day for others. They repeat the words of the Lord Jesus, "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind," and proceed to carry them out to the very letter. "It was a happy day in the old Konak in Manissa," writes the teacher, "when the Christmas tree was dressed. Five of our King's Daughters were delighted to carry the gifts. This picturesque old house was built by a wealthy Turk for his harem. Upstairs at each of the four corners of the great hall he built two rooms for each of his four wives, and made them to be locked and unlocked from the outside only. In one of these large apartments, now bright and cozy, the girls filled candy bags, brightened oranges, and apples with bits of gold leaf, labeled packages, and prepared candles." At last all were provided for: the dyspeptic man, the paralytic, the blind, the homeless woman, the widow and her only son, a child of seventy years, and the woman without a voice. Some planned to go the day before and clean the rooms for their poor friends, giving them a few paras for a bath. It did not need the little treat of turkey for dinner, and honey cakes for tea, to make this memorable Christmas.

THE ISLANDS OF THE SEA.

Fifty years ago Fiji was a synonym for all that is horrible and wicked. There was never a thought of peace and goodwill. What a contrast to this picture from the pen of a traveller who recently visited the islands:

"Lying at anchor, a short distance from the shore, I passed Christmas eve on deck, enjoying the perfect night of the tropics. By degrees, as the evening passed on, the sounds of life on the beach were stilled, and nothing was heard but the ceaseless rustle of the leaves of the cocoanut palms, which always hum an obligato to life in the islands. One by one the lights went out. All around lay sleeping in the rich flood of moonlight. But when the southern cross stood erect to the watchful eye, there came out sweet and clear on the heavy air of night a ringing peal of laughter, a chorus of merriment repeated time after time, until it fairly seemed that there could be nothing in life but midnight glee.

"It was the famous Fijian laughing call, which can be heard for miles, when raised by the fresh voices of women and children, and, as far as it can be heard at all, it never loses its quality of merriment. At once the light of torches was seen beneath the trees, gathering toward the beaches, and at either side of the town. Then songs arose from each of the centres of light. On the one hand were the voices of the boys, on the other the girls were singing apart: yet not apart, for each group of singers alternated the verses of the song of praise, and the chorus was in unison across the sandy gap. The song was a hymn of Christ's nativity. The words were Christian, but the air was an old Fijian festival chorus, which has been transferred to the new Christian feast. Verse after verse was sung, and with each the parts of the choir drew nearer to each other along the beach, and at last their voices and their torches were in one, and the song rose even clearer through the gentle night, as these children sang their waits before the town.

"In the morning no man went forth to work, no woman took her nets upon the reef, for Christmas is kept like Sunday. There was a service in the church, a service of song where every voice was heard, a service of rejoicing as befits the day."

And so after centuries of gross darkness and wrong the star of Bethlehem begins again to shine in the East, and the hearts of wise men everywhere are turning

toward the light which guides to the Saviour of the world.

"The dark night wakes, the morning breaks,
And Christmas comes once more."

The Biblical World.

CHRISTMAS IN THE HOSPITAL.

And is it 'Christmas mornin'? I've lost my count of time,
But I thought it must be 'Christmas, by the bell's sweet, solemn chime;
And I had a dream of the home folks, just as the mornin' broke—
May be 'twas the bells that brought it, ringin' before I woke!

An' is it 'Christmas mornin'? An' while I'm lyin' here,
The folks to church are goin'—the bells do ring so clear!
Fathers an' mothers an' children, merrily o'er the snow,
Just as we used to go, on 'Christmas long ago!

Oh, yes! I know you're good, nurse, an' I do try not to fret,
But at 'Christmas-time, no wonder it my eyes with tears are wet;
For I saw so plain, in my dream, the brown house by the mill,
An' my father an' my mother—ah me—are they there still?

And, as they go to church to-day—do they think an' speak of me,
An' wonder where poor Katie is across the great blue sea?
An well it is they cannot tell! an may they never know;
For sure 't would only break their hearts to hear my tale of woe!

My mother must be gettin' old; an' she was never strong;
But then her spirit was so bright, an' sweet her daily song;
She sings no more about the house, but I know she prays for me,
An' wipes away the dropping tears, for the child she ne'er may see!

My father's bent with honest toil an' trouble bravely borne,
But never has he had to bear a word or look of scorn;
An' never shall it come through me! for all I have been wild,
I'd rather die a thousand deaths than shame him for his child!

Ah yes! I have been sinful, but some were more to blame,
Who never think because of that to hang their heads for shame!
Ah well! I mustn't think of them, but of myself, and pray
That He will take away the sin—who came on Christmas day!

An' thank you for the letter, nurse, you say the ladies brought,
'Twas kind of them to think of me—I thank them for the thought;
The print is easy read, but oh! what would I give to see
Just one small scrap of writin' from the old home-folks, to me!

But nurse, those bells seem tellin' of the better home above,
Where sin an' sorrow cannot come—but all is peace an' love,
Where broken hearts are healed at last, an' darkness paced away—
An' He shall bid us welcome home who came on Christmas day!

FIDELIS.

THE CITY OF CHILDREN:
BETHLEHEM.

BY SHAILER MATHEWS.

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Each town of the Bible possesses some peculiar characteristic drawn from its history. Nazareth has the memory of the Jewish lad growing up as a carpenter to become the world's Saviour; Jezreel, the tragic story of the kings of Israel; Capernaum had its teacher; Shiloh, its pious boy and aged prophet; Hebron, with its sepulchres and pool, tells the story of a patriarch's burial and a king's vengeance. But Bethlehem is always the home of children. There the little son of Jesse grew up unnoticed by his elder brothers; there was born the child of Mary; and there his little fellows suffered the wrath of a jealous king. Were it not for its connection with these children, Bethlehem would hardly be remembered, for not even the sad stories in the book of Judges, or the beautiful story of Ruth, give to it any such general interest.

The modern town is beautifully situated on the sides and summit of a semicircle of hills. All about it are olive groves and vineyards, pasture lands and grain fields. It is in truth a "House of Bread"—and, indeed, of water, for, although it has but one spring, and that a poor one, the so-called Fountain of David, the aqueduct carrying water from Solomon's pool, is tapped at the foot of the hill, and there are also reservoirs. Indeed, there is no more prosperous looking town and region in all southern Palestine. The town itself, with its eight thousand inhabitants, lies a little off the fine carriage road from Jerusalem to Hebron, and to reach it one has to drive up a rather steep and rough road running between garden walls and the ubiquitous religious buildings. As one gets into the town the road grows narrower, until at last its width would not