

THE STORY EVER NEW.

ONLY an old, old story
Of infinite love and grace;
Only a beam of glory
Lighting a baby face.
But through the rolling ages,
No story half so dear;
Of all earth's sunshine glory,
No beams so bright and clear.

Only a manger lowly,
Wherein the sweet Child lay,
Only a mother holy,
Watching the hours away.
Only a sweet song stealing
Down through the quiet skies;
Only a star's soft beaming,
Points where the Baby lies.

Only some shepherds kneeling,
Paying their homage sweet,
Pouring their richest treasures
Down at those Baby-feet.
Strains of that far-off anthem
Float through the world since then,
Breathing of "Joy in Heaven
On earth peace to good men."

Hark! to the joyous chorus—
"To you a King is born";
Star of the East now lead us,
Lead us this Christmas morn.
Till, like the faithful shepherds,
We kneel in homage sweet,
And pour our heart's best treasures
Down at those sacred feet.

Thus reads the sweet old story,
Old, but still ever new;
Know we the wealth of glory
It brings to me and you?
Know we those tiny fingers
Opened Heaven's portals wide?
But for the helpless Baby
All the whole world had died?
—*Florena M. York.*

ONLY A LITTLE BOY.

I WANT to tell you something about a little boy, his hopes and his troubles, and how he came to spend a very happy Christmas—such a one as I wish you all. He lived a long way off, and spoke a different language from yours, but he belonged to the same holy faith, and had the same love of the dear Christ Child, and the things both hallowed and happy which He brings with Him when He comes. So I think you may like to hear from this little boy.

His name was Konrad, and he lived in a small village in the Tyrol, with the great snow-crowned mountains around him, on which the blue gentians and pretty alpine roses grew. He had never seen any other country in his life; he did not know what a town or railway or steamship were like, but he felt quite sure that God never made anything so beautiful as the "Innthal," and he loved it with all his heart and soul. And in the summer, when he was out on the sunny mountain-side minding the cattle, or in the winter when he ran to Mass through the pine-wood, all white and solemn with the hoar frost, he would say to himself:

"I will be a painter some day, when I am a man, and put all this in a picture; and then people a long way off will see it and they will say 'How beautiful the Innthal must be,' and then they will come and see it for themselves, and be happy."

The wood of which I have spoken was just behind the cottage in which he lived, and the wind, as it sighed among the pine trees, told Konrad wondrous things. He did not know much, and the waving of tree tops could not really tell him anything he did not know already; but it filled his mind with those vague and great longings for what is beautiful which, in the soul of the young painter are not unlike the growing pains some children feel in their little bodies.

And then, too, he would lie awake in his small bed at night weaving stories for himself of brave knights and fair ladies, of fairies and of angels, such as Aunt Minna would sometimes tell about, when all sat round the fire listening.

Aunt Minna came but seldom, for she lives a good way off; but Konrad, with the help of the snow, and the trees, and the stars, and the wind, could not add to those stories and weave them one into another, till he fell asleep, and dreamed. Then when his mother came and said: "Konrad, it is time to get up," he would awake to dream by day as well as by night, till—for he

was but a little fellow after all—his brothers would go and slide on the frost-bound water hard by, or build up a huge snow man, or go for some frolic in the woods in spring, and then he would leave his dreams, and be a merry, laughing child.

"But," you will say, "if he had never seen anything but his father's cottage, and the small church and village, how could he even picture knights and queens, and fairy palaces to himself?"

Well, he once had what to the little boy was little short of a vision. It was on a hot July evening, when the shadows of the hills were beginning to grow long, and the Angelus bell had done ringing. Konrad stood, bareheaded, beside his father, finishing his Aves, when a coach drew up on the bridge over the Inn, just under the statue of St. Joan of Nepomuck; and a lady, all in white, as spotless as the snow on the mountains, with eyes as blue as the gentians and hair as golden as the sunset, called to Konrad's father.

Something must have got wrong with the coach, for the beautiful young lady alighted and came into their cottage. Konrad did not quite know how it all happened,—but there was sitting in the kitchen with Anna, the only little girl and baby, on her knee. Then she noticed the other boys, and at last she called Konrad to her side, saying:

"And what are you going to be, dear child, when you are a big man?"

The boy look up into her fair face, with its wondrous crown of golden hair, and something in those eyes made him tell his secret, all shy and trembling as he was, and he said:

"I am going to be a painter, lady, because I love the Innthal, and when it is winter and the pine-trees are white, I say it is prettiest so, and I wish God would never let it change. But then thaw comes and the spring with the cuckoo, and the flowers and the waters seem to laugh for joy as they run quickly down in the mountains and then I think, 'so it is better after all'; but yet it seems a pity that one pretty thing should push away another. But I know there are such men as painters who do better things than the picture of St. Florian in church; and if I were one of them I would paint the pretty things as they come, and then, when they went I should not mind, but I should feel God had let me make them live in the picture, as they could not go on for ever, really."

The lady looked at the child and smiled; but it was a kind smile, and her voice was kinder still as she said:

"Then, Konrad, you wish to be something very great indeed. You are quite a little boy yet, but when you are bigger, if you are still of the same mind, I will help you."

And then Konrad knelt down and kissed the beautiful lady's hand and wondered, perhaps, if she were not an angel after all.

But all life ought not to be lived in a dream, and Konrad, always a dreamer, grew worse as he grew older. His mother was a good, kind woman, and loved him dearly; but it was troublesome if she sent him errands to find he forgot them, that when she bid him watch the fire, it generally went out, and that more than once he angered his father by letting the cattle stray.

One day in the beginning of November, when the deep snow was already keeping the slumbering earth warm, Konrad's mother called him, and bid him mind little Anna, as she had business in the village. His father was at Bruneck, where he had gone to buy a new cow, and the other boys had gone to the monastery to say their catechism to Father Francis; but Konrad was glad enough to play alone with baby Anna, whom he loved almost better than anyone else, and his mother trusted him. O how she would have hurried home if she had known what was happening!

After playing for a while Konrad got into dreamland—a land so fair and bewitching. He saw the gracious lady once more, but it was not there—it was in a fairy place with silver-winged angels all around, and then.....he came to himself with a start, his mother was in the doorway and was uttering a great scream; and there was Anna by the fire, laughing at the bubbling of the soup in the great black pot. Konrad saw his mother run towards her but it too late—she had pushed the pot over and the scalding stuff was pouring all down her frock.

It was getting late—baby Anna was crying piteously,—while Konrad stood near white and heartsick.

Presently the poor mother, who was walking up and down trying to soothe the little thing's wailing, turned round and noticed him. Poor

soul! she was much tried, and in her grief said words for which she was very, very sorry afterwards.

"You are a bad, wicked boy," she exclaimed. "Dear little Anna! she is so badly burned I think she will die, and it is all your fault. O, if only father were here!—he could have walked over to Lavant and fetched the doctor—he might have saved her, but O! we can do nothing now, God help us," and she burst into tears.

Konrad's face grew whiter and whiter, but he was too miserable to cry! Little Anna going to die! and he had killed her by his carelessness! Suddenly his face brightened—the doctor should come, he would know how to cure her—he would go and fetch him at once! It is true Lavant was seven miles off, and it was getting late and the snow was deep—but what of that? If he could but save his little sister, it would not much matter if he died in the snow on his way back. Nobody could ever love such a wicked boy again; "and yet," he thought with a great sob, "if I do die, I think God will know I was not really so very wicked."

So he slipped out of the warm cosy kitchen out into the cold still air. The moon was rising—at least he would have light for his journey. He prayed to his good angel to guide him aright, and I am sure he did so, for the boy did not miss his road, but his poor little feet grew so numb with cold he could no longer run or walk fast as on starting—and he had at least three miles to go.

Poor little child! the friendly moon began to be over-clouded—but for the shimmer of the pure snow it would have been dark indeed, and presently the snow began to fall, not in unkindly gusty drifts, but softly, softly, making him feel strangely drowsy as he crawled along.

He could just see faint distant lights and he knew the village of Lavant could be so very far off now, but he felt he could never reach it—he and done all he could! He sank to the ground praying:

"Oh, holy Mother Mary! send the doctor to little Anna—take care of us, we are your children."

Then he fell asleep, and the snow went on falling gently, gently—making a soft white quilt over the weary child.

II.

It was Christmas Eve. In a fine castle not many miles from Lavant a tall fair lady and her husband were arranging a Christmas-tree with gold and silver ornaments, and rosy apples, and waxen tapers, and underneath they piled gifts for their children—story books and many toys—but on an easel near at hand they placed a large and beautiful picture of the Christ Child and His Mother. And then the lady smiled and said:

"I think they will be all pleased and happy to-night."

At six o'clock the tapers were lit and the lady called in her children, while her husband carried in a pale, wistful-eyed little boy, who, indeed, was no other than our Konrad, and laid him gently on a couch in front of the picture.

"See," said the lady's eldest daughter, Marie, running towards him, "that is your Christmas present—there are toys and suits of clothes like yours for you to take home to your brothers, and a big doll for Anna, but the picture is for you, because mamma says you want to be a painter and that you will like it better than anything else."

Konrad's pale face flushed, and he clasped his little hands reverently as he gazed with all his soul in his large eyes at the Blessed Mother and her dear Christ Child, and the holy angels and the happy shepherds. The child looked and looked, but he said nothing, and Marie was a little disappointed. Perhaps mamma had made a mistake, and that dear little Konrad, whom they had fetched to their Christmas tree this morning to give him pleasure, would have had more if they had given him some nice toys—if so he should have hers, the kind little girl resolved. But Marie's mamma, who was standing a little way off, knew better, and beckoned the children away.

"Let me talk to Konrad for a few minutes, dears," she said. And then she went to the boy and laid to her fair white hand on his little dark head. "You like your present, I know," said she.

"O, kind lady, is it really all my own to keep?" he asked.

"Yes, Konrad," she replied, "and when you are a man, you too will paint the Blessed Mother as well as our dear Innthal, and then you will give me a picture in return for this