

## Christmas.

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

Merry, merry Christmas!  
 The little children sing it,  
 And from every spire and steeple  
 The glad bells ring and ring it!  
 The gateway or its morning  
 Is resonant with praise;  
 And chorals at its evening  
 Unnumbered voices raise.  
 No day so set to music  
 In all the year of days,  
 As Christmas, Merry Christmas,  
 With its sheaves of lofty praise.

Merry, merry Christmas,  
 Ago-long the sad world sought it,  
 Until from out the heart of heaven  
 The holy angels brought it.  
 Then all the earth grew brighter  
 By the shine of one sweet Star,  
 The lighted torch that sent its beams  
 Oh! glad and wide and far.  
 Then bent a fair young Mother  
 Above a little Child,  
 And the angels sang their glorias  
 While that happy Mother smiled.  
 Then Christmas, Merry Christmas,  
 Came hither, came to stay,  
 When the Star, the Star, stood over  
 The place where Jesus lay.

## "No Heart for Christmas."

BY MARION HARLAND.

The phrase occurs in two letters that lie upon my desk. They are in all things else very unlike. The first and the longer of the two is from a woman whom acquaintances cite as one of fortune's favourites. She has a beautiful home and beautiful children fill it; she has wealth which she delights to dispense among those who need it, and she further brightens the world by a presence as generous and fair as the sunshine. Her very handwriting bespeaks character and intellect. The four words I have quoted fall, as by their own heaviness, into the closing paragraph of pages that sparkle with fun and fancy. It is as if a golden goblet full of bitterness, had been carried high and steadily until an unexpected jar, or it may be, a weary turn of the bearer's wrist, sent a few dark drops splashing down upon the paper.

"The children's brains have the topsy-turvyness inseparable from the season," she writes. "I dutifully shut my eyes when I open cupboards and drawers, and seal my ears to stage whisperings that go on in corners. The air is thick with mysteries many, and young brows are bent by portentous plaus. I who seem to joy in their joy, hide the heaviest secret of all. I have no heart for Christmas. The holiday season and the weeks that usher it in are one long agony. God grant me grace not to let my darlings guess at the truth!"

Between and under the lines, as through a lattice from which the view is ever the same, I see the long, sore mound where the widow will lay on Christmas Eve, by stealth, not to dampen her children's spirit, holly and laurestinus and such roses as she always used to find on Christmas morning beside her plate.

The unformed chirography of the second letter belongs to the day when the mothers of the passing generation insisted upon having a fine point to their quill pens as essential to "a lady-like hand." The characters are pale, and I catch myself wondering, in turning the ruled sheet to the light, why women of the writer's age and mental caliber never chance to buy black ink.

"Only Husband and Me are left in the Old Home," I read. "None of our eight children can be with us at the Holy days. Five of them are in Heaven. The other three are scattered over the face of the earth. Sam is in Chicago, Mary is travelling in Italy; Frankie is in New Orleans. Their Father and me, we sat by the fire in the sitting-room last night, and looked at the Chimney-piece where the stockings and socks used to hang of a Christmas eve, and we said to one another, 'we haven't got no heart for Christmas, this year. Don't let's keep it.' When the holiday is so near be so up, the Holydays ain't holydays."

Of course I know what I ought to write to each of these women, separated by social position and education as widely as if they were residents of different planets, yet sisters, in love, in longing, and in suffering. So many Christmas stories, and so many holiday homilies have been run in one groove that the reader of this four-foot-on-a-fender chat anticipates each step of the "ought-to-be." The sad hearted should forget selfish sorrows, and the lonely their yearning in present action for others' good. The route by which self-oblivion is said to be reached is as well-known and is

beaten as hard as the road to post-office and church in any country-town where the people read the Chautauquan course after the manner of to-day, and pray after the manner of their fore-fathers. The story of the freezing soldier who restored the circulation of his own blood by chafing the frozen limbs of his comrades, has been used to point this moral until point and edge are blunted.

True, the blessed fact abides that giving of one's self to him who is faint and weary, builds up, instead of impoverishing, the giver. Obedience to the homely rule of trying to forget how badly off we are by ministering to those who are yet more wretched, has lightened many a heavy spirit and healed the smart of countless wounds.

I have no such prescription ready at hand while the mournful eyes of these two women seem to look into mine. The open sheets are to me the revealed depths of stricken souls that refuse to be comforted by human counsel. Representative souls they are, haunted ceaselessly by recollections of what will be no more for them on this side of heaven. The joy-bells of Christmas Eve have an undertone of desolation to their ears. The happiest days of the year are the saddest to them. Close to their side, and thronging their knees, are shadowy forms that shut out the light of Christmas candles and Christmas Sunlight. For them,

"It is time for memory and for tears."

God help them! God help us all as memory reviews the tender grace of days for which we would barter years of the life that now is ours. The years that, in passing, have strewn ashes upon our heads, have scattered them more thickly upon hearts and hopes. It is not weak sentimentality that makes us feel it would be disloyal to push aside thoughts of those who once made the glad season more glad. To smother reminiscence and to rebuke tears, is stoicism, not Christian resignation. They who have gone from our sight have a right to their place in our affections and in our homes at this trying-time. They were given to us to have and to hold. The Father does not mock us by snatching away that which He bade us love ourselves. Our treasures are in His holy ward and keeping, but they are still ours. Forgetfulness would be ingratitude to the Giver; to cease to love and long for the departed would be fickleness. To the eyes of the mother-heart the row of little stockings, limp at nightfall, fat and misshapen at dawn, is unbroken. She could show you where the baby's pink socks were hung on his first Christmas Eve, and where the eldest boy persisted in driving a particularly stout nail to support the prospective weight of the stocking that came up to the knee of a long leg to meet his knickerbockers. Do not let her try to tell you where and when the gaps in the goodly line began to come. The smell of the roses that blushed upon the breakfast-cloth beside the wife's plate, is as present to her imagination as when her silent kiss repaid the donor. Her children are the very pulse of her heart, but their voices will never again sound as sweet as when upborne by deep, manly tones. Talk as bravely as we may of the work of Time the Healer, there is a look in the eyes with which we try to reassure one another that tells of wounds forever raw, and a void we do not hope to fill.

We bring gay spirits to other festivals. Christmas touches finer and fuller chords. Since the rounding of the grave that cast the first lasting shadow over our lives, we have learned by heart a new and ineffable meaning in "I believe in the communion of the saints." We observe the Yule-tide as a sacrament in the sense given to the term by the early Fathers of the Church; "the visible sign of an invisible grace." Unseen guests are with and of us. The chimes that girdle the globe with music on Christmas-night are not lost in heartless space. Even where.

"Loyal hearts and true  
 Stand ever in the light;  
 All rapture through and through  
 In God's most holy light."

one element of that thorough rapture must be the memories that unseal our tears, and which bring tender smiles to their eyes. They must think and talk of us on the Holy Birthday as we think and talk of them, but with a difference the thought of which should change mourning into thanksgiving. For them the puzzle and the pain, the fever and the fret, the storm and stress,—sad alliteratives that make up the major part of our lives,—are eternally overpast.

While we ponder upon these things and keep them in our hearts, our Christmas-sacrament becomes a Feast of Commemoration. It is the true All-Souls' Day.

"Alas, for him who never sees  
 The stars shine through his cypress trees.  
 Who hath not learned in hours of faith  
 The truth to flesh and sense unknown,  
 That Life is ever Lord of Death  
 And Love can never lose its own."

Interior.