

Christmas Hymn.

GERMAN CHORAL OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

BESIDE a manger lowly,
A mother, pale and mild,
With eyes, serene and holy,
Is watching o'er her child.
I, too, would gaze and ponder,
Bowed down in homage low,
For sight more full of wonder
This earth did never show.

Across the mists of ages,
That Infant's form divine,
Unchanging still, engages
The heart before His shrine.
For though in God's anointed
The world no charm espies,
Faith reads the sign appointed,
"To Christ my Lord," she cries.

Behold the "Branch" of David,
The "Shiloh," famed of old,
The Son of Virgin Mother,
By prophet's lips foretold,
Behold the seed of woman,
Repairer of the Fall,
The Child Divine, yet human,
Emanuel, Lord of all!

Oh, tender plant upspringing
Amid the desert dry!
Oh, dawn of promise flinging
Thy rays o'er earth and sky!
Oh, glad and gushing river,
From love's own fountain poured,
Spring up—flow on forever,
Till all men know the Lord.

One of the Least.

CHRISTMAS EVE—and how the wind did blow, to be sure! Bob Armstrong said to himself, as he bent his head and plunged along through the deep drifts, that he never knew it to blow so hard. Not that Bob could remember very long—only fourteen years; but it seemed to him as if he had been living in this beautiful world of flowers and snow-storms a great while; and, as I said, he was sure he never knew the north-east wind to whirl him about so furiously, nor the sleet to sting so sharply, as on this particular evening. And Bob knew something about frost and snow; for, like every other healthy boy, the skate and the sled were his chief winter enjoyments. He tried to whistle, but the wind fairly blew the tune back between the red lips, puckered up into a round O, and he could only pull his cap down farther over his ears and plunge on into the storm. Now Bob was on his way to a Sunday-school Christmas festival, and it would have taken a pretty fierce storm to have kept him at home, or to have driven the shine out of his eyes, or the cheerfulness from his boyish heart. They didn't often have festivals at this little Methodist chapel, where his father and mother sat in a straight-backed pew each Sunday morning, and he took his place afterward in the row of sturdy little fellows who were his classmates. The older members of the church had talked the matter over, the brethren rather opposing the plan, and the sisters favouring it, until at last it had all been settled in the cheeriest manner possible, and it was announced that on the evening before Christmas the chapel would be lighted and trimmed, there would be a tree, and a small present for everyone who came. The tickets of admission were accordingly given out a week beforehand; and how many times Bob Armstrong had taken out that piece of pink pasteboard and read the print upon it during those seven days I wouldn't attempt to say.

The chapel with its tiny belfry was in sight, and Bob's eyes grew still brighter under their wet lashes, as he saw the twinkle of lights through the

arches. He was kicking to he caught beneath one looked, it moved that it was a girl, thrown over her head wrists clinging to the. She was standing on tiptoe, looking with wide-open eyes at the scene within. Bob, like the knight he was, felt a surge of sympathy come over him at the sight of the poor creature left outside, while he was going in to all that warmth and comfort—he a boy, and she a girl! He jumped down into the snow again and approached her; but either the storm roared so loud or she was so intent on the view through the window, that she did not see him until he was close at her side. He put out a red mitten and touched her shoulder. The girl, whom he guessed to be of about his own age, shrank back like a frightened cat under his touch, and looked up at him without moving farther, watching to see what he would do. "Holloa!" said Bob, "what you 'fraid of? P'rhaps you took me for a policeman!" and he straightened up as he spoke.

The girl shivered, clutched the handle of a basket, which Bob now saw for the first time, and drew the shawl tightly over her chest. "I'm goin'," she said, hoarsely. "I ain't doin' nothin'. What d'yer want o' me?" "Why—I—you see—" stammered Bob, really confused by the odd sound of her voice, it was so unlike that of the nice girls he knew on his street—the ones he caught sight of, at that very moment, through the window. "Well, I'm goin'," she muttered again, turning away. "Hold on—I say!" cried Bob, putting out the red mitten impulsively. The girl stopped. Bob glanced toward the window. He could see the festoons of evergreen as they hung gracefully across the pane inside, and beyond them the topmost twigs of the tree. At the same instant a chorus of child voices arose, accompanied by the sweet notes of the little organ, such as Bob had always thought the angels must have in heaven nowadays, instead of harps. It was a Christmas carol they were singing, the first of the exercises on the programme. Then would come the bags of candy.

The girl turned slowly away once more, in such a humble, enduring sort of way that Bob's heart smote him, and, even if he had wavered a little bit a moment before, he was a knight again. "You must have a ticket to get in," he said with hasty heroism. "Here's mine; you go ahead. I guess I'll go home." The girl took the ticket with a dazed look, not believing her good fortune. She did not understand, and Bob still had time to withdraw his offer and go in himself. But she was a girl, you know, and he was a great strong boy. And then, what was Christmas for? Half pushing, half leading, he brought the girl to the steps, whisked the snow from her shawl with his cap opened the door, had her inside before she fairly knew what he was about, and—shut himself out into the storm.

No, the superintendent did not rush after him, and draw him in among the merry-makers. Nothing extraordinary happened at all, and Bob lost his festival. But do you think he mourned over it, or suffered from the cold, on the way home? As soon think of the shepherds

in a forest live. He gained a scanty living by cutting wood. He had a wife and two children, who helped him in his work. The boy's name was Valentine, and the girl was called Mary. They were good obedient children, and a great comfort to their parents.

One winter evening this happy little family were sitting quietly round the hearth, the snow and the wind raging outside, while they ate their supper of dry bread, when a gentle tap was heard on the window, and a childish voice called from without, "O, let me in, pray; I am a poor little child with nothing to eat and no home to go to, and I shall die of cold and hunger unless you let me in!"

Valentine and Mary jumped up from the table and ran to open the door, saying, "Come in, poor little child; we have not much to give you, but whatever we have we will share with you."

The stranger-child came in, and warmed his frozen hands and feet at the fire; and the children gave him the best they had to eat, saying, "You must be tired, too, poor child; lie down in our bed, we can sleep on the bench for one night."

Then said the little stranger-child, "Thank God for all your kindness to me!"

So they took their little guest into their sleeping-room, laid him on the bed, covered him over, and said to each other, "How thankful we ought to be, we have warm rooms and a cozy bed, while this poor child has only the sky for his roof and the cold earth for his sleeping-place."

When their father and mother went to bed, Mary and Valentine lay quite contentedly on the bench near the fire, saying, before they fell asleep, "The stranger-child will be so happy to-night in his warm bed."

These kind children had not slept many hours before Mary awoke, and softly whispered to her brother, "Valentine, dear, wake! and listen to the music under the window."

Then Valentine rubbed his eyes and listened. It was sweet music indeed, and sounded like beautiful voices singing to the tones of a harp:

"O, Holy Child, we greet Thee! bringing Sweet strains of harp to aid our singing.

"Thou, Holy Child, in peace art sleeping, While we our watch without are keeping.

"Blest be the house wherein Thou liest, Happiest on earth—to heaven the highest."

The children listened, while a solemn joy filled their hearts; then they stepped softly to the window to see who might be without.

In the East was a streak of rosy dawn, and in its light they saw a group of children standing before the house, clothed in silver garments, holding golden harps in their hands. Amazed

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Now near the house; from
to a twig which he planted
ground, saying, "This twig
shall become a tree, and shall bring
forth fruit year by year for you."

No sooner had he done this than he vanished, and with him the little choir of angels. But the fir-branch grew and became a Christmas tree, and on its branches hung golden apples and silver nuts every Christmas-tide.

Such is the story told to German children concerning the beautiful Christmas trees; and though we know that the real little Christ-child can never be wandering, cold and homeless, again in our world, inasmuch as He is safe in heaven by His Father's side, yet we may gather from this story the same truth which the Bible plainly tells us, that if any one in the right spirit, helps a Christian child in distress, it will be counted to him as if he had indeed done it to Christ himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."—From the German.

Christmas for the Aged.

MAKE the Christmas a glad time for the aged. Let each child, even the baby, have its little tribute to bring. Let the dear old heart know that its own gift, however simple, is prized and expected by every one of the household band. Held the trembling hands that may have grown slow to fashion the dainty miracles of needlework. Keep all the secrets of what she is going to give to this, that, or the other friend. Go patiently on the shopping jaunts, even if the feet are slow, and the eyes take a great deal of time in searching for "just the right thing." Alas for the day when grandmother is no longer here to "do" for us or to be "done" for! Let us remember how surely that day is coming nearer; and that, to make her thoroughly happy and conscious of how dear and necessary she is, is our only way of beguiling the aged to linger in the home. As the truest joy comes always from the consciousness of power to bless, so the more fully we can convince the aged of the blessing they are to us, through their experience and their presence, and through their angelhood, that has so often been born in their sorrows, the more we shall really minister to them. They are often afraid of becoming useless, conscious of failing powers, fearful of being in the way, or casting a shadow on the household mirth. See to it, dear young friends, that on this of all days of the year they be made to know how much we love and need the light of the faded faces, and assure them by every gentle attention that Christmas would not be Christmas without the "angel in the house."—Mary Lowe Dickinson

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."