

but to go to jail. There was, indeed, as he afterwards remembered, some money due to him for a piece of work that he had just completed; but he did not know how to get it, and would have been loth to let his employer know of his condition. There was nothing for it but to go to prison, and to remain there until the twenty four hours should be passed. He would not be free again until nearly noon on Christmas Day.

Meanwhile, poor little Annie and Dick passed a miserable night. They had never known their father stay out so long before, and they had no money for food or firing. When the next morning did not bring news of him, Annie went out to make inquiries. She asked as many of his acquaintances as she knew whether they had seen him; but she did not happen to hit upon any who could give her the information she desired. She went also to three of the public-houses that he sometimes visited, but she did not know of that particular one which her father had entered with his friend. "There were so many," as Annie said, despairingly, to herself; so many flaring gin-palaces and taverns and public-houses, that she did not know which to visit first. So she gave up the search, and came back to her little brother.

Dick's cough was worse. He was feverish, too, and seemed exceedingly weak and ill. Annie resolved not to leave him again. She would stay with him and nurse him, and not go in search of her father, who was certain, so Annie thought, to come back sooner or later. So she made some tea, and toasted some bread at the tiny fire, and sang to little Dick until he fell asleep. Every time she heard a footstep on the stair she started and trembled with excitement—it was her father, perhaps, and he would have money in his pocket wherewith to buy food and fuel; for the weather was bitterly cold, and the stock of wood and coal was nearly exhausted. There was a little bread and a few spoonfuls of tea in the cupboard; but when these were done there was no money to buy more. Would father never, never come!

Dick opened his eyes after a time, but they were glazed and dim. He spoke, but there was no sense in what he said. Annie ran for the landlady, and asked her advice. The landlady shook her head. "He's dying, my dear; you may be sure of that," she said. "It's want of proper food, I expect, more than anything else. I'll send you up something for him—a pudding nicely flavoured with brandy, now—"

"Oh, not brandy, please," cried Annie. "I'm teetotal, and so is he."

"A mite like that!" exclaimed the landlady indignantly. "Well, I never! Here's gratitude!" and she flounced off to her kitchen with an angry brow. Whether she was really offended, or whether she forgot her promise, Annie could not tell—but the pudding never came.

So the day wore on. It was Christmas Eve, and the shops were gaily decked; and many fathers and mothers were buying pretty things for their children in warm, comfortable homes. But these two children sat in a cold garret; one ill, the other hungry, miserable—without fire and without food. It was a pitiable sight; and it is sad to think that many children are brought to like misery by their parents' self-indulgence.

Christmas Day dawned at last; and when the joy-bells were ringing, and the bright wintry sunlight streamed into the dull little room, Dick opened his blue eyes, and looked once more at Annie.

"Is it Christmas?" he asked.

"Yes, Dick."

"And is there roast beef and plum-pudding for dinner?"

"No, Dick; I'm afraid not."

"Well, I'm rather glad," said Dick, gravely. "for I couldn't eat it if there was. I'm glad for myself, I mean. Is father in?"

"No, not yet."

"What a funny Christmas Day!" said Dick.

Annie was silent. After a little pause, Dick's weak voice was heard again.

"Annie, I don't think much of Christmas after all. People say it's a jolly time. I think, Annie, maybe there's a better sort of Christmas—away far away up in heaven. His voice broke, and sank away into silence, but he smiled to himself, as though he had happy thoughts.

"No, Dick, no. You're not going to leave me!" said Annie, replying to what she knew he meant, rather than what was actually said.

"I don't know," said Dick. "I think heaven must be a warm, pleasant place, not like this. Annie. It's so cold here—not much like Christmas Day, is it?"

There was a dark figure in the doorway. A man came in and stood by the bed, listening. Dick saw him first, and nodded.

"Merry Christmas, father," he said, in his weak, little voice; "though it don't seem much like Christmas to any of us, do it?"

"May God forgive me!" said Morris hoarsely, as he realized, in one rapid glance, the state of desolation which his own actions had brought about. "Grant me my child's life, and I will give up the drink! I will serve thee as I never served thee hitherto! But give me back my child!"

The prayer was heard. Little Dick, although seriously ill and very weak, did not die. Kind friends were found to help the erring but repentant father; and in course of time—in another home, away from his bad companions—Morris became noted as a steady, serviceable workman, a kind father, and an earnest Christian.

Annie and Dick, with bright eyes and rosy cheeks, had now a truly happy home; but, throughout their happiness, father and children alike preserved a vivid remembrance of that Christmas-day which proved the turning-point in their lives, and was, therefore, in very truth, one of the most profitable Christmas Days that they ever spent.

John Morris passes the festive season now much more after the usual fashion, though without strong drink; but there is no Christmas Day that he will ever remember with more thankfulness than the one in which he came home from prison to hear his little boy saying, in his weak, patient voice, "It don't seem much like a merry Christmas to any of us, do it?"

But Dick's Christmas greetings are now spoken in a much merrier style.

BAD BOOKS.

NEVER, under any circumstances, read a bad book; and never spend a serious hour in reading a second-rate book. No words can overstate the mischief of bad reading. A bad book will often haunt a man his whole life long. It is often remembered when much that is better is forgotten: it intrudes itself at the most solemn moments, and contaminates the best feelings and emotions. Reading trashy second-rate books is a grievous waste of time also. In the first place, there are a great many more first-rate books than ever you can master; and in the second place, you cannot read an inferior book without giving up an opportunity of reading a first-rate book. Books, remember, are friends—books affect character; and you can as little neglect your duty in respect of this as you can safely neglect any other moral duty that is cast upon you. Keep the mind pure, and the life will be pure.

Led by the Star.

BY CARLOTTA PEERY.

Led by a star they came
And knelt at his feet,
Bringing their gold and myrrh,
And incense sweet.
No royal sign he wore,
No robe nor ring,
Yet in their souls they knew
He was the King.

Watching their flocks by night,
Marvelous strains
Came to the shepherds on
Judaea's plains.
Swift from the lips of that
Mystical throng,
Down to their waking hearts,
Came the glad song.

And what was the song that was sung on that wonderful
far off morning,
When the voice of the heavenly hosts gave the dutiful
shepherds warning?
What was the gift that was given to the world that day,
as far
To the place where the young Child lay, the wise men
followed the star?

Glory to God on high—the infinite majesty proving,
Peace and goodwill to men, the sign of an infinite loving;
A gift from the soul of love—unmeasured by earthly price,
The song of homage and truth, and beauty and sacrifice.

The star the wise men saw with hope in its gracious
beaming,
The star of a deathless love, still chimes for a world's
redeeming;
And still to the deepest depths the heart of the world is
stirred
By the song that so long ago the Judean shepherd's heard.

Sweetly the self-same strain may rise from lips that falter;
Weakest of hands may bring the choicest of gifts to the
altar;
'Gainst the truest and best of giving there's never a bolt
nor bar,
Wise and simple alike may follow the shining star.

Peace and goodwill to men; O bells in the steeple, ring it!
Peace on earth and goodwill; O brother to brother, sing it!
Up to the mountain tops and down to the vales below,
On and on, forever let the Christmas message go.

Ring out, O bells! O songs
Uplifting, glad and sweet,
Your music to all time belongs,
So long as hearts shall beat!
Sing, heart, the perfect strain,
Again and yet again;
The immortal song of praise to God
And love to men.

It is customary at this season to make good resolutions. These resolutions are so frequently broken, that sneering at them has also become a custom. Pick up almost any newspaper next Tuesday or Wednesday, and you will be pretty sure to find a number of small jokes at the expense of the penitents who have been "swearing off." That many New Year's resolutions should be treated in this way is not a matter of wonder. Many of them are thoughtlessly made and quickly broken. Still, the making of such resolutions is a hopeful thing. It shows that the maker has within him a desire—feeble it may be, but still a desire—to be a better man, and to lead a better life. That desire is a good thing. A man is never in a more hopeless condition than when he has no desire to be or do better. The New Year's resolution shows that the man who makes it thinks at least once a year. He takes stock, and tries to form a reasonably correct estimate of himself. That, too, is a good thing. There is little hope for a man who does not think seriously once a year. Instead, then, of belittling New Year's resolutions, let all look upon them as good as far as they go—as evidence that the maker still measures himself morally, and has a desire to do and be better.—*Canadian Presbyterian*