

A Two-Handled Christmas Cake

BY REV. ROBERT STEPHENS.

AND so Christmas is near us once more. Yes, a few days and the days of Christmas-tide will be ours to enjoy.

How memory recalls the past as Christmas comes to our view! I am carried back to the days of boyhood when in the shipbuilding yard the last bit of work was done. Tools were all put out of the way, and we turned our faces toward our humble homes. Mine was one of the very humblest of them all. It was a house of three rooms; one downstairs and two up. The one downstairs answered for the kitchen, dining-room, sitting-room, reception room and parlor. The rooms upstairs were our bed-rooms. Toward such home on Christmas eve my feet started with joy, for the year's work was over once more. But what was there in such a home as mine that a boy could expect to find to make his Christmas happy? It was a poor man's home; and though he was sober and industrious in the extreme, yet the poor man did not receive more than just enough to pay the way of the family through the year.

My young heart could not expect costly presents—oh, no; extensive preparations for Christmas, such as I have seen since, were never thought of. What could dear old mother do to make her poor boy feel it was Christmas eve? Ah, yes, I see it now! There it is hanging over the fireplace against the wall. What is it? Why, it's a two-handled Christmas cake, and it was for me. Pointing her blessed finger to the cake on the wall, she would say, "My son, that is for you." At once—ah, yes, and they come back to me now as then—tears of gratitude to that blessed old mother for the two-handled Christmas cake, hanging to the wall. Memory takes up that little thing to-day, and as it does there comes to me:

1. Mother was in harmony with the great Christmas-time, in commemoration of the birth of Jesus into this world. And though as poor as a poor, hard-working man's wife could be, yet her heart took in the spirit of the event, and she would do something to remind her little son that she was in harmony with Christmas joys. It's a great thing to be in harmony with the Christmas spirit, and to express that feeling in deeds of kindness to others.

2. Then, as memory brings back the two-handled Christmas cake on the wall, I see old mother doing her very best for her son, who would return from the hard work in the shipbuilding yard. It was not much—oh, no; but it was that much. And it was her very best. My friend, let me ask you to do this for your children. It may not be much you can do, but let me ask you to be sure and do your very best for their children on this Christmas time, for they will recall this Christmas some time in the future. What shall there be in the chamber of their memories? Let them see a mother doing her very best to make them happy.

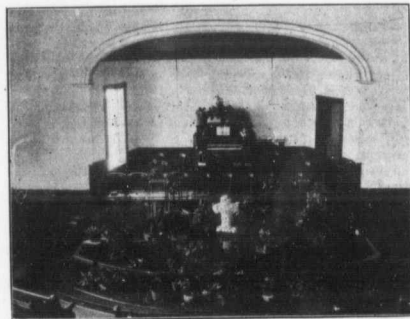
3. Then I see, as memory recalls the two-handled cake on the wall, that mother was doing something, not only for then to help her son, but she was engaged in a work that was going to continue for years to come, and it was going to be to her boy admonition, consolation, reproof, all through his life; for how could I be bad, how could I do wrong, with the actions of my blessed old mother planted in my memory! How could I get discouraged and give up the battle when I had before me the actions of a mother doing her very best? O my friends who have children, do your very best for them in your own home. Do you want to save your children from sin and to the right? Then make your home the best place this side of heaven for your children.

4. And then the two-handled Christmas cake that mother made and hung on the wall on Christmas eve was one of the deeds done by that blessed woman to hold her boy to the old home. Ah! this Christmas-time, my memory brings it all back to me. There stood the old home, humble, poor, at times suffering, but have I ever seen a place that now in life I turn to as to that old home? No. Parents, do you want to save your children! Of course you do. Then make your home attractive and happy. Cause your child to think there is no place like that home. It will not take much to do this. Do your very best to hold your children to your old home, and see to it that you labor to do something that will be planted in the memory of your child, so that when Christmas-time comes, wherever the child is, he may turn with tears in his eyes, as I am to-night, and think of the two-handled Christmas cake hung on the wall.

Church Decorations

EVERY well organized Epworth League has a "Floral Committee," whose business it is to send flowers to sick people, to strangers, shut-ins, etc., and to look after the decoration of the church on anniversary occasions, for conventions, rallies, etc. Scarcely any Committee of the League has greater opportunities of usefulness than the Floral Committee. Everybody loves flowers, and the personal attention that is involved in sending a bouquet is usually very much appreciated. The work of decoration may not be quite so important, but it helps wonderfully to make any special event a big success to have plants and flowers tastefully arranged in front of the pulpit. It brightens the services and develops an atmosphere of cheer and comfort.

The two most important things to remember in planning for decorating a church are, to have everything tastefully arranged, and to guard against over-decoration. It is well, if possible, to have some striking feature as a kind of centre-piece around which plants and blossoms can be grouped. In the accompanying illustration of the Burford Church, the *pièce de résistance* was a beautiful cross of white flowers, which was very much admired. Of course anything of this kind



DECORATIONS IN BURFORD METHODIST CHURCH
For Circuit Epworth League Rally.

costs a good deal of work, but there is a large amount of satisfaction when it is finished. Before any of the plants are put in position, there should be some kind of plan upon which to work, and perhaps an outline on paper.

To pile in plants wherever they can be placed, without regard to general symmetry, will produce a grotesque and ridiculous general effect. There will be a variety of opinion in the Committee, but if there is one person of superior taste it would be better to leave the plan entirely to her. Do not undertake to use every potted plant in the neighborhood, and do not fill every available inch of space. Some of the most beautiful displays are at the same time the most simple.

There are usually a number of people, who have plants which they would be willing to loan. Great care should be taken to preserve these from injury and return them promptly.

Visions of Childhood

A CHILD'S adventures in the world of romance have infinite charm and reality. Long before he has seen the ocean, a mountain, a waterfall, or a foreign city, he has "travelled in the realms of gold." He has sailed with Columbus and Captain Cook, and wintered with Franklin in the Arctic seas. He has ridden through the desert on a camel and slept by Indian camp-fires. He has seen Horatius buffeting the waves of y-flow Tiber, and the Black Prince charging at Cressy. By the time I was twelve years old I knew the Pyramids and the Colosseum, I had seen Quintus Curtius leap into the gulf, and Caesar fall by Pompey's Pillar. I had fought with the Crusaders, and retreated from Moscow with Napoleon. Since those days I have visited many lands and seen the ways of many peoples, but the visions of my childhood have not been displaced.—F. W. Macdonald.