

It was a clear, cold morning. Ice had formed in the water-trough and hung in crystals from the eaves, and every rude post and rail and branch and tiny twig was furred with a delicate frost that was the very witchery of beauty, while the sun-rays, striking down through the encircling mist, kissed the bleak, frowning rocks to a rosy redness.

Here, far remote from the world's tumults, this Christmas morning had an inexpressible calm; the earth seemed waiting for that glorious song to break the silence: "On earth peace, good-will towards men."

When Hannah and the boy went without to tend to the wants of the stock, they were welcomed with evidences of joy. Old Gray whinnied, the pigs squealed lustily, the cattle lowed, and the chickens uttered faint cackles as they disconsolately huddled together. Not until the comfort of these dumb creatures was fully seen to did they return to the house. There Reuben, with his face aglow from the frosty air, had built up in the deep fire-place a breast-work of dry hickory upon the back log and smouldering forestick, from which presently the flame leaped upward in ruddy jets. The breakfast sent forth its savory smell. The malted cat slept on the hearth-stone. An air of homely comfort pervaded all.

After breakfast Hannah tidied the never disorderly kitchen, and because it was Christmas Day, sat down in a sort of Sabbath-day quiet.

"I want ter tell ye why it air Christmas, Reuben," she said.

He sat beside her silently, although he could comprehend little that was not in tangible shape before him; but he sorted his candy and smacked his lips over its sweetness. She was unlettered, but her simple, vivid word-pictures caught his fancy. She told him of the child in the manger. He could see the little red barn, with old Gray in her stall, the rack piled with succulent hay, and the dun oxen looking with mild, astonished eyes at a baby crying there.

"It war a pore place fer a baby," he said. "The mother shouldn't"—

Then his restless eyes wandering, he saw something through the window.

"A man out thar! A big horse!" he cried, and ran joyfully to the door.

Hannah followed him, glad to see a neighbour, but she did not know whose was the animal that was being blanketed and tied to the fence-rail, and the young man who made his way towards the house was a stranger.

"Does Hannah Crawdon live here?" he asked, doffing his cap.

It was the first time in years she had been called by her husband's name.

"Yes, thet air me, tho' it's by my maiden name, Byles, I'm usually called. Come in, come in; tho' I 'low ye're a stranger ter me, ye're welcome all the same, sir! Ye must be cold, ef ye've rid fur. Set by the fire and warm!"

She bustled about with shy, simple hospitality, but the stranger stood silent,

his eyes noting everything; the sanded floor, the spinning wheel in the corner, the strings of dried apples on the walls, the queer delft plates on the dresser shelves, then his gaze came back to the pretty, faded woman with her appealing eyes. His breath came short and hard—he grew pale.

"Mother," he said.

For a few seconds, not a word was said. The clock ticked loudly, the cat purred in the sunlight, a foolish fly lured from its sleeping place buzzed on the window panes. Hannah's eyes dilated. She bent forward.

"Man, ye said mother! Who in God's name air ye?"

"Your son Robert. Heavens! she is dying!"

He caught her and laid her on the settle. She heard his words as through a mist.

Yes, this was death. A spirit had come to her from the next world! Bobby had been sent to fetch her. She was ready, — but she heard faintly Reuben's pitiful whimper, and her gentle heart reached back to the poor, helpless lad, and the dumb creatures she was leaving—if she could just have seen the neighbours, to give them into their charge!

But as the moments went by, and the faintness passed, she grew conscious of a strange reality about this man who was chafing her hands. She heard the fire crackling, the tame robin chirping in his cage, and the words that were spoken by the warm breathing lips.

"Father took me away from here when I was a baby. I always thought you died when I was born. I came to find you as soon as I knew the truth."

The story stopped here. He could not tell her now that his father had never told him his history until the truth came out as that father lay on his death-bed.

"My aunt brought me up. She has been a mother to me."

She listened, hardly comprehending at first, then she started up with the pitiful cry,—

"Then, ye never war lost, ye war took from me? An' ye hev growed up without me! Never knowin' how I've hungered for ye! Why, it war twenty-five year ago ye wer born in this very room, Bobby. It war a Christmas day!"

He kissed her pitifully.

"And I have come back to you on Christmas day, mother. I'am your Christmas present." He tried to laugh, but a sob choked him.

"Thank th' Lord, oh, thank th' Lord!" She held him off, greedily devouring with her eyes his every feature. There was the very dimple in his chin that she had kissed so often in his babyhood; his dark eyes had the look of those soft child-eyes that she had so loved. She was quiet in infinite content. She was like a battered hulk that had drifted into still waters.

"How long ken ye stay with me,

Bobby?" She asked the question as the thought that some time he would leave her disturbed her new found peace.

"Till you have made ready to go with me, mother."

"Would ye take me with ye, Bobby? Oh, praise th' Lord, he hes give ye ter me again! I can't ask no more. I ken die happy thet I've seen ye. But ye've bin brought up different from me, Bobby. It war my pore ways ez yer father didn't like, an' they might shame ye too, Bobby. Ye hed best leave me here!"

He turned to her in the beauty of his noble young manhood. To cherish this hurt, injured life was his chief desire.

"Mother, now that I have found you, nothing but death shall part us."

And then she slipped down upon her knees to pour out her soul in devout thanksgiving.

Old man Crapple, who happened in that day, as was his usual custom, to wish Hannah "merry Christmas," astonished his old horse when he came out, after what must have seemed to that unblanketed animal an interminable time, by urging him at full speed toward the settlement. He was like new wine that must find vent. He had the most amazing, astonishing story to tell "how thet leetle, lost Bobby of Hanner Byles' had jes' come back ter her, a growed-up man, this 'ere blessed Christmas day!" and so fast flew the good news that before night-fall many of the mountaineers had actually seen this incredible statement verified in the flesh.

Two weeks later old man Crapple and his better half, who were jogging along the road that led past Hannah's cabin, had to stop to take in the desolate significance of the smokeless chimney and boarded-up doors and windows.

"I tell ye Adam," said Mrs Crapple, "it war powerful good of Bobby ter let her take thet poor Reub along; but, lawsy! it did seem jest ez ef thar war nothin' in th' world he wouldn't do ter please Hanner."

"Waal, waal, Mariar," he said slowly, "Hanner's gone, sure enough, but I don't expect ez how I'll ever git over the astonishingness of that leetle dead Bobby of hern, comin' in on her a man growed thet Christmas day!"—*Margaret Hammond Eckerson.*

### A Christmas Song.

SHALL we sing you a song of the Christmas time,  
When the angels came down with their glory,  
And sang through the night in the shepherd's sight  
The song that is so famous in story—  
How the Father above in pity and love,  
Had come softly through the star-sprinkled blue  
And laid in a manger a far brighter Star?  
Yes, we will sing it, and sing it to You.

I know a path by angels trod  
Before the world was old;  
But o'er it came in later days  
A multitude untold—

A shining host, a praising host—  
Let God be praised for them,  
Who sang his praise in lofty lays  
O'er hallowed Bethlehem!

No tongue can tell the sacred pomp  
That swept from heaven that day,  
And trailed its glory past the spheres,  
To where the Infant lay—  
Lift up your eyes in vast surprise,  
Ye shepherds, on the scene,  
And see the beaming forms that hang  
And the heavens and earth between!

Upon their heads are golden crowns,  
Their robes are white as snow,  
Sweet lightnings from their faces flash  
Upon the vale below;  
Before the glory of the Lord  
The stars turn pale and flee—  
Oh, what a sight that blessed night  
For shepherd swains to see!

Through all the still and scented air  
There comes a deeper calm,  
As it from fear lest it should hear  
Naught of the coming psalm—  
And now the air grows sweeter still,  
Slow beat the balmy wings,  
Clear o'er the hushed and raptured earth  
The choir of angels sings.

And far across Judean hills  
Swell forth the floods of praise—  
I would that music such as this  
Might sweeten all my days;  
For lo, 'tis Paradise to hear  
The glory of that sound,  
That mounts so grandly to the skies,  
So sweetly seeks the ground.

Full many an age has passed  
Since that great song was given  
Which sweetened all our acrid air,  
And wedded earth to heaven;  
But still each year we seem to hear  
The angels sing again,  
The dear old song, the grand old song,  
In sweet and lofty strain.

And ever as we give our gifts,  
And homes with garlands weave,  
Our hearts will turn their backward gaze  
On that first Christmas eve;  
And sing his praise in joyful lays  
By whom the Child was given,  
Whose advent here such mighty cheer  
Gave all the choirs of heaven.

### "Unto Me."

BY SARA J. DUNCAN.

WHEN the branches crack and glisten,  
And the bells ring out andasten,  
Wheeling out of Christmas snow—  
Out of skies of long ago—  
Many thought-birds come and sing  
Sweeter than their friends of spring.  
You can find them if you search,  
And they're apt to fly in church,  
Once I caught one as it flew  
Hopping round from pew to pew,  
And it sang, at my desire,  
Rather better than the choir.

Oh, the song was clearer, higher,  
Than the most expensive choir!  
And the sense did chime far sweeter  
Than all rhyme in any metre;  
But the burden of its singing  
While the Christmas bells were ringing  
Was just this: that Christ on earth,  
On the night of his glad birth,  
Lies in many a little cot  
That the stars have quite forgot,  
Stretches out a quivering hand  
Where the city outcasts stand,

Knowing hunger, knowing cold,  
Naked, sick, and poor and old;—  
Still is with us in such guise  
As we'll know in Paradise.  
"Ye have done it unto me."  
That white snow-flake charity  
Crystallized tear that love sets free,  
Dropped on rays of beggary  
Falls upon Divinity.