

STRAYED.

The father came in from the harvest-field and his toil
 'neath the burning sun,
 The mother, borne down by her household cares, felt
 glad that the day's work was done,
 The evening meal was before them spread, and the sun
 was sinking low,
 As the children and servants came round the board—all
 there save little Joe.

"Now, where is my Joey?" the father said, "that he
 comes not into tea?
 Has any one seen him playing around—or know ye
 where he can be?"
 They looked at each other, but no one knew where the
 pet of the household stayed,
 For he had not been seen for many long hours in the
 haunts where he frequently played.

The mother turned pale as the men uprose, to seek for
 the darling child,
 For she knew that the forest, not very far off, was still
 but a virgin wild;
 There were ravenous beasts in its undergrowth and
 dens and pitfalls deep,
 And serpents and insects crawled about where the child
 might possibly sleep.

There was need for haste in that little band, for the day
 was closing fast,
 And they knew that darkness would settle down ere the
 edge of the forest was past;
 So they carried their lanterns to lighten their feet, and
 frighten the beasts of prey,
 In case that their search should be much prolonged, for
 they knew not where Joey might stray.

They searched and searched till dawn of day in that
 virgin forest wild,
 For the sorrowful father's tender heart could not give
 up his child.
 The men returned to their needed rest and the gentle
 mother's care,
 But the elder brother's loving heart his father's search
 must share.

The day wore on, when a trace was found in the prints
 of his little feet,
 In a bed of mud, where a stream had been dried up
 by the summer's heat;
 With eager haste, they followed the track amid the
 bright wild flowers,
 Which he'd stopped to gather—now here—now there,
 then thrown away in showers.

At length, at the foot of a sheltering tree, lying sweetly
 asleep on the ground,
 With traces of tears on his much-begrimed cheeks,
 their wandering darling they found
 His little hands bleeding and scratched by the thorns,
 one little foot naked and bare,
 His clothes sadly torn, his limbs all begrimed, and
 dust, leaves, and twigs in his hair.

When the sun went down on that summer night there
 was joy in that house untold,
 For the wandering lamb, by God's grace and love, been
 carried home to the fold;

The father thought not of his weariness, nor the brother
 his toil and care,
 Nor the mother her soul's deep agony, while she waited
 on God in prayer.

The household love and the household care were lavished
 on Joey's frame,
 And it seemed that such music had never been heard as
 was found in the wanderer's name;
 They could never forget all the sorrowful time when the
 angel of death seemed so near,
 And so from his wand'ring far from his home little
 Joey was even more dear.

Is this not a picture of many of us who stray from our
 Father's care?
 To wander alone in pathless wilds, and their unknown
 dangers dare?
 Allured by the flowers, we wander on, and see not the
 pitfalls near,
 Our eyes are filled with their brilliant hues, and our ears
 too dull to hear.

So we miss our loving Father's voice as he calls us
 homeward long,
 And our Elder Brother's heart of love and flow of pity
 strong;
 We drink of the impure streams around, and trol
 through the mire and clay,
 And snatch at bright flowers, which so fade in our
 grasp, we are glad to throw them away.

So, stung by the insects, and torn by the thorns, and
 turning our backs on the light,
 We wander still farther away from our home, and grope
 in the darkness of night;
 Yet still our dear Father and Brother call on, and hold
 forth the lantern to guide,
 For they cannot but long for each wandering one to be
 nestling close to their side.

When flashes of light from their Lantern of Truth
 reveal them to any lost soul,
 He sees himself ragged, disabled, and poor, and dirty
 from head-crown to sole.
 Then the Brother's great love makes Him rescue from
 death the erring and penitent child,
 And bear him in safety from pitfalls and snares lying
 hid in the wilderness wild.

He heals and He cleanses the sin-defiled soul, and strips
 it of rags and of self,
 And clothes it with robes of His righteousness pure,
 which cannot be bought with earth's pelf;
 Thus, spotless and pure, He presents it to God, Himself
 bearing suffering and shame,
 Which is due to the sinner, as punishment just, for
 rejecting His love and His name.

And oh! how the arches of heaven's court ring when a
 wanderer's brought to the fold!
 For that soul is more precious in archangel's sight than
 worlds with their products of gold.
 Then, Christians, be doing! work while it is day, to
 rescue the wand'ring and lost,
 And tell them of Jesus, the sinner's highway, and what
 their redemption has cost.