

The Song of a Shepherd Boy at Bethlehem.

BY JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY.

Sleep, thou little Child of Mary,
Rest thee now.
Though these hands be rough from
shearing,
And the plough,
Yet they shall not ever fall thee,
When the waiting nations hail thee,
Bringing palms unto their King
Now I sing.

Sleep, thou little child of Mary,
Hope divine.
If thou wilt but smile upon me,
I will twine
Hosannas for thy garlanding.
Thou'rt so little to be King,
God's desire!
Not a bribe
Shall be left to grieve thy brow,
Rest thee now.

Sleep, thou little Child of Mary,
Some fair day,
Wilt thou, as thou wert a brother,
Come away
Over hills and over hollow?
All the lambs will up and follow.
Follow but for love of thee,
Lov'st thou me?

Sleep, thou little Child of Mary,
Rest thee now.
I that watch am come from sheep-stand,
And from plough.
Thou wilt have disdain of me,
When thou'rt lifted royally,
Very high for all to see:
Smilest thou?

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Pleasant Hours:

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

Rev. W. H. Withrow, F.D., Editor.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 19, 1896.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING.

There is no need to study the almanac in order to be made aware of the fact that Christmas is coming. Everybody knows it instinctively, for when a friend approaches there is something in his proximity which communicates itself to us, and if Father Christmas is not our friend, who is? Besides, there are hosts of visible signs. Is there not a keen coldness in the air? Is not the ground covered with snow? Has not everybody bought a new pair of skates, or dusted the old ones? and is not the frozen surface of every pond as gay as a fair? And then only to pass through the streets is to see the preparations for Christmas. Are not the shops like pictures? Is there not plenty of good fare for the person or the mind, for the house or the household? Apples and anti-macassars, beef and books, cheese and church-music, dolls and dresses, embroidery and emblazonment, furs and fables, geese and goodies, hams and hampers, illustrations and illuminations, and nobody knows what beside, all proclaim in unmistakable terms the good news that Christmas is coming. Besides, are not the children home from school and the grandchildren coming? And are not gray heads and black alike busy in laying plans for the successful production of a charade, or the happy performance of Blind Man's Buff? Is not everybody concerned about the satisfactory disposal

of holly and mistletoe? and are not all the little ones eager to prove that their feet have grown, and that they must have larger stockings, both on that account and also in case Santa Claus should visit them? Yes; it is quite evident that Christmas is coming, and we are all making ready. The adults are preparing little surprises for the children, and the children have been hoarding their coppers that they may prepare surprises for their elders. And we are all going to be together as far as possible, and vexing differences are to be forgiven and forgotten, and care is going to be put to sleep, and we are drawing so close to one another that love shall grow warmer and faith stronger, while we sing in harmony the young, shrill voices and the quivering old ones—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will to men."

CHRISTMAS IN OTHER LANDS.

I am going to tell the young folks something about the way the children keep Christmas in other countries besides their own. So let us begin with that far-off end of Europe, Norway and Sweden, where the Christmas season is called the Julefred, or Yule-peace. At Julefred all the courts are closed, and every one stops disputing and quarrelling; and if people are feeling angry

horses of the "Christ-child," as he comes flying through the air with his krippa full of presents; but the Italian children go gravely with their parents to churches and cathedrals, to see the bambino, or child, who presents them with their Christmas gifts.

The Spanish children hide their shoes or slippers in the bushes on Christmas eve, and find them filled with fruit and sugar-plums on Christmas morning.

In France the young people stand their shoes in a convenient place for the good Noel to drop gifts in. Sometimes if the shoes of a bad boy are among them, he finds a whip in one in the morning, and he must be a stupid fellow who cannot take so sharp a hint.

Very different is the feeling of the German child. He waits with feelings of mingled awe and pleasure for the coming of two important personages, the "Christ-child" and the "Knecht Ruprecht." The latter person questions naughty children, and threatens them with punishment, till the "Christ-child's" intercession saves the culprit, and wins its pardon; then these two Christmas apparitions lay down their burdens of gifts, and depart.

In some parts of Germany the good Saint will have a Christmas tree brilliantly illuminated with wax candles, to hang his gifts upon; he is not satisfied simply with the stocking in the chimney,

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear."

BY EDMUND HAMILTON SEARS.

We shall never tire of reading this magnificent hymn. It will go down through the ages until the coming of the millennium:

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good-will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lonely plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

With all the woes of sin and strife,
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring:
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

And ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way,
With painful steps and slow,—
Look now; for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
Oh, rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing!

JUNIOR EPWORTH LEAGUE PRAYER-MEETING TOPIC.

DECEMBER 27, 1896.

Hymn 24.

"God rest ye, little children, let nothing
ye affright,
For Jesus Christ your Saviour was born
on Christmas night.
Along the hills of Galilee the white
flocks sleeping lay,
When Christ the Child of Nazareth was
born on Christmas Day."

LOVELY SEASON.

Everybody loves the Christmas season. It is the time for family reunions. Those who have long been separated, again enjoy each other's society, and spend a few pleasant hours together, and, so to speak, live their lives over again. Then, too, it is the season when presents are given and received. Friendships are thus renewed and ripened. Children and young people especially rejoice at the approach of Christmas, as on the morning of that day they are sure to awake early and see what Santa Claus has brought them. This very fact should make children love Jesus, for the season which is kept in remembrance of his birth is to them the happiest season of the whole year.

THE ASSOCIATIONS OF THE NATIVITY.

Born in Bethlehem. This word means a house of bread. This is truly significant, inasmuch as Christ calls himself "the bread of life." What bread is to the body, to give it sustenance and support, Christ is to the soul. He feeds us with living bread.

ATTENDANTS.

Angels chanted the hymn of his nativity on the plains of Bethlehem. What a glorious song it was—"Peace on earth, good will toward men." The doctrines preached by the Saviour, and the precepts which he laid down, to guide mankind, all have the tendency to promote peace among mankind, and bring "glory to God in the highest."

THE SHEPHERDS.

The occupation of the shepherds often required their attendance in the night season. While they were thus engaged, they received the glad tidings of the birth of the Saviour. Truly these were glad tidings. What can we conceive so likely to produce joyous feelings as the news of the Saviour being born.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE NEWS.

All people. The shepherds were the representatives of mankind, at this time. They first learned the news, but it was not to be confined to them. The whole family of man were embraced in the tidings of the Saviour's birth. The news has reached us. Children are the lambs of the flock. No other system of religion makes such provision for the welfare of children as Christianity does. Christ always bestowed special attention on them, and even when the disciples would have kept them from coming to Christ, he said, "Suffer them to come." He loves them, and commanded the disciples to feed the lambs. Will not our readers love the Saviour?



A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

with each other, or children are, they make it up, and are loving and kind, and there is a deal of feasting and good-humoured merriment. On Christmas eve the shoes of all the family are cleaned very carefully, and brightly polished, and set in a row before the hearthstone to indicate that during the coming year everything will be peaceful and pleasant in the family. In the country places almost every family that can, spreads a table with the good cheer of the season, and then the doors are left open, so any one may come in and eat and drink and be merry. The way that the presents are given is very peculiar—the person who wishes to give a present wraps it up in a quantity of straw, or paper, or rags, and slyly flings it in at the open door or window when no one is in sight. Isn't that a droll way?

In Belgium the children fill their shoes with beans and carrots on Christmas eve, and set them in the chimney-place for the good Saint's horse. In the morning they expect to find them filled with sweetmeats and fruit in return for their good behaviour.

In Holland the children hang up their woollen stockings by the tiled chimney-piece, and then go soberly to bed, quite sure that good St. Nicholas will visit them, provided they do not disturb him in his visit.

Bohemian children listen anxiously on Christmas eve for the chariot and white

and it is from this whim of his saintship that the custom has spread into other countries, and come over to our own. The Christmas-tree of to-day, however, is only a successor to its prototype, the ancient legendary ygdrazil, or eternal tree, which has its roots in earth and its top in heaven.

The English child's Christmas has none of the delightful features we have described, except the Christmas-tree lighted with tapers and hung with gifts; but he has the Christmas-boxes, and the evening is spent in all sorts of sports, such as snapdragon, blind man's bluff, and some more modern games.

Holland gave us Americans the good-natured Santa Claus, with his sled and reindeer careering over the housetops, bringing his goodly store of Christmas gifts.

In Germany the schoolboys and choristers make the midnight air ring with their merry carols. The "three kings of the East, the angel Gabriel, and the star-singers" parade the streets; and similar processions go about in Italy, France, and Spain. In former years, and perhaps even now in some localities in England, the Christmas waits, young lads, make the air vocal with lovely Christmas carols; but in our country these are reserved to be heard in church and Sunday-school, and sometimes they ring out in chimes from the church steeple.