

AGNES WHITE'S CHRISTMAS.



DVENT is over. Christmas is here. The holy song-chanted by angel voices on our Saviour's birth-night, above the fields of Bethlehem, will find its echo to-day in every region of the earth. It will be sung in stately cathedrals, and in quiet village churches, in lowly cottages, and on the wide ocean. Wherever Christ's name is named, there is Christmas joy to-day. Anthems and carols are sung, churches are dressed with holly and bay, and holy solemnities are kept. Christian homes are decked with green boughs, and Christian families assemble together and rejoice. Every nation has its own way of showing Christmas joy. In England there are happy fireside meetings; children sing carols, and receive presents; everybody has a kind wish for his neighbour: and the rich show their gratitude for the blessings of the day by dispensing gifts to the poor. In northern countries, such as Sweden and Norway, where through the long dreary winters the horses and cattle are kept entirely within doors, a double allowance of food is dispensed to each, that the dumb creatures may share in man's joy. A sheaf of corn, too, is set up upon a pole in front of every house, that the little birds may have plenty, and rejoice. Throughout Germany a bright Christmas-tree shines in every home, whether palace or cottage, and tells of the Light of the world which lit up the stable at Bethlehem to-day. In India, where even at Christmas the weather is hot, I have been told that nosegays of gorgeous tropical flowers are placed in the churches, on the stands for books, one for every worshipper. These pleasant customs are all good, if they are the genuine fruit of Christian joy in the heart, only we must take care, each one for himself, that our joy is Christian, and beware lest in our happiness we forget the great and glorious event from whence it took its rise. After the holy Child was born, and the angels had rejoiced and the shepherds had worshipped, Mary, we are told, "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." This is what we should strive to do: one little girl I knew who was enabled so to do on the last Christmas Day she spent on earth.

Agnes White was born in a small country village towards the south of England, and was sent early to its school. It was a homely, quiet place; its children had none but simple pleasures, and the most prized of them were gathered round Christmas-tide. You shall hear how they spent it. When the Advent Collect gave notice that Christmas was coming, preparations for the carol-singing began in the school. First the words were learnt, and then the tunes, all the little hearts being set on the coming festival. School broke up on the 23rd of December; but the elder boys and girls were allowed to bring

green boughs, and dress up the school-room, while their elders were doing the same thing for the church. Very pleasant work they thought it; and when it was over, they sang through the carols, and ran home, their mistress telling them to mind and put on plenty of warm things against she saw them again. At seven o'clock they met at her door, glowing with their run in the cold air, the boys muffled up with gay worsted comforters, and the girls in cloaks, or their mothers' shawls. She arranged her little party, and taking the youngest child by the hand, walked with them to Squire Wilmot's house. They crept before his dining-room windows, and then began their liveliest carol. The shutters were soon thrown back, and the windows opened. The ladies and gentlemen listened, and thanked them; then they handed them biscuits and fruit out of window, and sent them elder wine. Wishing their friends a merry Christmas, the singers hastened away to the parsonage. They were expected there; so the windows were open, and two little girls' heads peeping out of them. The carols over, the singers were brought into the warm room all gay with holly, and were feasted with cake and good things, till they were dismissed each with a Christmas present, the boys to run home, and the girls to keep by their mistress's side, till she dropped them one by one, each at her mother's door. Such was Christmas Eve! And the festival itself, how delightful it was! There were no lessons at morning school, but Christmas hymns, and texts, and there were pictures of Bethlehem and the holy Child; and the church was so beautiful, and the singing such a pleasure, and then the happy meeting with elder brothers and sisters at home, and the Christmas dinner and merry evening!

Eight of these bright seasons had Agnes White known, since at five years old she first went to Hadley School; the ninth found her stretched on a bed of sickness. She had taken cold a few weeks before, inflammation of the lungs had followed, and was plainly bringing her to the grave. You shall hear how she passed her last Christmas on earth.

Her kind schoolmistress, Mrs. Best, was unable to go and see her till the afternoon service was over: she then hastened to her bedside, and found her alone. A print of Bethlehem was pinned to her bed; her Bible, open at the second chapter of St. Luke, was in her hand; and the bookmark, which had dropped from it, bore the words—

"Unto us a Child is born."

"A happy Christmas to you, my dear child!" said Mrs. Best. "I could not come sooner to say it; but I'm afraid it's dull for you all alone."

"Oh, no, mistress, not dull!" answered Agnes with a smile. "I heard the carol-singing last night: it was a good way off: but I knew