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# PEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

ENLARGED SERIES.—VOL. II.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 23, 1882.

No. 24.

## THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF.

**T**HERE is a pretty and curious custom in Norway. A pole is fastened up over the door of the barns and the farm

house, and on the top is tied a little sheaf of wheat. A traveller was for a long time puzzled to understand what it could mean. He did not know the language well enough to understand the answers of the peasants when he asked them about the sheaf, so he had made up his mind that the little sheaf of corn must be an offering set out for the use of Nigel, or one of the spirits of wind, water, or storm, in whom the peasants of Norway more than half believe. But he was wrong.

One day he fell in with an old Norwegian gentleman, who stopped at the same farm-house, and who spoke English. He asked him the meaning of those mysterious sheaves of corn. He laughed heartily at the traveller's guesses, and then told him that the little sheaves were put out at Christmas-time every year, "that the birds might have a merry Christmas." Every Christmas-eve the old sheaf is taken down, and a fresh one put up. This Norwegian custom is worthy of imitation.

## HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED.

"CHANGED!" exclaimed Deacon Green to the dear Little School-ma'am, a year ago come Christmas, "I should think they had changed. Why, many's the time I've heard my dear old father tell how, years ago, when he and Aunt Mary were children living on their father's farm in old England, the least little present used to delight them.

"They were well-to-do people, the Greens were; but to find one book or a ball or a shepherd's pipe in the Christmas stocking would make father perfectly happy when he was a boy; and his sister thought a box of sugar-plums, or a new doll, or any one pretty gim-

crack, was a joy indeed. Changed!—well, I'd like to know! Why, I'm told that a boy of this day, a real boy of the period, would consider himself a much-abused fellow if he didn't find on his Christmas-tree a ball, a six-

cars, a box of parlor magic, a pistol, a performing acrobat, a real watch, a gold scarf-pin, gold cuff buttons, a bound volume of *St. Nicholas*, and twenty or thirty other books, more or less, besides a pocket-book with gold

## AN ANGEL IN AN ULSTER.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY REV. WASHINGTON GLADDEN, D.D.

"WELL, sir, I am sorry; but I've done the best I could for you."

It is the conductor of the night express on the Eastern railroad who is speaking, and the passenger, to whom his remark is addressed, stands with watch in hand, near the door of the car, as the train draws into the Boston station.

"I do not doubt it," is the answer. "You cannot be blamed for the delay. The other train must have left the Western station already."

"Undoubtedly, the time is past, and they always start on time."

"And there is no train that connects through to Cincinnati before to-morrow morning."

"No."

"Well, that settles it. Thank you."

Mr. Halliburton Todd steps down from the platform of the car, and walks slowly past the row of beckoning and shouting hackmen. He is too good a philosopher to be angry with the freshet that delayed the train, but there is a shade of disappointment on his face, and a moisture in his eye. He is a wholesome-looking man of forty-five, with greyish hair and beard, with blue eyes, and a ruddy countenance. Probably he is never much given to grinning, but just now his face is unusually grave; nevertheless, it is a kind face; under its sober mask there is a world of good nature. In short, he is just the sort of man that a shrewd girl of twelve would pick out for an uncle. If anyone thinks that is not high praise, I should like to have him try his hand at commendation.

There are, indeed, quite a number of boys and girls to whom Uncle Hal is both a saint and a hero. At that Christmas party, in the home of his sister in the Western city to which he has been hurrying, these boys and girls are to be assembled. All the married brothers



THE CHRISTMAS SHEAF.

bladed knife, a scientific top, a box of carpenter's tools, a printing-press, a jig-saw, a sled, a bicycle, ice-skates, a Punch-and-Judy show, a telephone, a steam-engine, a microscope, a steam-boat, a working train of

money in it, and a pair of kid gloves. "I may have forgotten something," added the Deacon, wiping his brow, "but, so far as I can make out, that's the proper thing for an average boy's Christmas, now a-days.—*St. Nicholas*.

to whom Uncle Hal is both a saint and a hero. At that Christmas party, in the home of his sister in the Western city to which he has been hurrying, these boys and girls are to be assembled. All the married brothers

and sisters, with their families, will be there. But it is of no use now for him to try to join them. The feast will be ended, and the circle will be broken, before he can reach Cincinnati. So he strolls out of the station and up the streets. No, he will not take a hack nor a horse car; happy people may consent to be carried; those whose minds are troubled would better go afoot. He will walk off his disappointment.

He trudges along the narrow streets, the drays and the express waggons, laden with all sorts of boxes and parcels, are clattering to and fro; porters, large and small, are running with bundles, big and little; the shops are crowded with eager customers. Mr. Haliburton Todd is too good a man to be dismal long in a scene like this. "What hosts of people," he says to himself, "are thinking and working with all their might to-day to make other people happy to-morrow! And how happy they all are themselves, to-day! We always say that Christmas is the happiest day in the year; but is it! Isn't it the day before Christmas?"

So thinking, he pauses at the window of a small paint-shop, when his attention is caught by the voices of two children, standing in the hall at the foot of the stairs leading to the stories above. On the sign besides the door-way he reads, "Jackman & Company, Manufacturers of Ladies' Underwear."

The children are a girl of twelve and a boy of ten, neatly but plainly dressed; a troubled look is on their bright faces.

"How much, Ruby?" asks the boy.

"Only seven dollars," answers the girl, choking back a sob. "There were four dozen of the night dresses, you know, and the price was two dollars a dozen; but the man said that some of them were not well made, so he kept back a dollar."

"The man lied," says Ben, "and I'll go up and tell him so."

"Oh, no," answers Ruby; "that wouldn't do any good. He wouldn't mind you, and he might not give us any more work. But the work was well done, if we did help; for you run the machine beautifully, and mamma says that my button-holes are every bit as good as hers. Just think of it! Only seven dollars for two weeks' hard work of all three of us!"

"We can't have the turkey," says Ben, sadly.

"Oh, no. I found a nice young one down at the corner store that we could get for a dollar and a half, but we must lay by two dollars for the rent, you know; and there'll be coal to buy next week. I'm sure mamma will think we can't afford it."

"Come on, then," says Ben, bestowing a farewell kick upon the iron sign of Jackman & Company.

Mr. Haliburton Todd has forgotten all about his own disappointment in listening to the more serious trouble of these children. As they walk up the street, he follows them closely, trying to imagine the story of their lives. They stop now and then for a moment to look into the windows of the toy-stores, and to admire the sweet wonders of the confectioners, but they do not tarry long. Presently, the eyes of Mr. Todd are caught by a large theatre bill, announcing the

Oratorio of the Messiah, at Music Hall, Tuesday evening, December 24th, by the Handel and Haydn Society. Mr. Lang is to play the great organ. Theodore Thomas' orchestra is to assist, and the soloists are Miss Thursby and Miss Cary, and Mr. Whitney and Mr. Sims Reeves.

"Correct!" says Mr. Haliburton Todd, aloud. He knows now what he will do with the coming evening. It is long since his passion for music has been promised such a gratification.

While he pauses, he notes that Ruby and Ben are scanning with eager eyes the same bill board. "Rather remarkable children, he says to himself, "to care for an oratorio. If it were a minstrel show, I shouldn't wonder."

"Wouldn't I like to go?" says Ruby.

"Wouldn't I?" echoes Ben, with a low whistle.

"Don't you remember," says the girl, "the night papa and mamma took us to hear Nilsson? Miss Cary was there, you know, and she sang this:

"Birds of the night that softly call,  
Winds in the night that strangely sigh."

It is a sweet and sympathetic voice that croons the first strain of Sullivan's lullaby.

"I remember it," says Ben. "Mamma used to sing it afterwards, pretty near as well as she did. And don't you remember that French chap that played the violin? Blue Tom, they called him, or some such name."

"Vieuxtemps," laughs Ruby, who knows a little French.

"Yes, that's it. But couldn't he make the old fiddle dance, though! And the boy tilts his basket against his shoulder, and ex-cutes upon it an imaginary roudale with an imaginary bow. "We used to have good times at home, didn't we—when papa played the violin and mamma the piano?" Ben goes on.

"Don't!" pleads Ruby, turning with a great sob, from the bright promise of the bill-board.

The two children walk on in silence for a few moments,—Mr. Haliburton Todd still close behind them. Ruby has resolutely dried her tears, but her thoughts are still with the great singers, and the voice of the wonderful Swede is ringing through her memory, for presently Mr. Todd hears her singing low:

"Angels ever bright and fair,  
Take, oh, take me to your care."

"Well, my child," he says in a low tone, "I don't think that angels are apt to have gray hairs in their whiskers, nor to wear ulsters; but there's an old fellow about my size who would like to be an angel just now for your sake."

While he is talking thus to himself, the children turn into the hall of a tenement house. Mr. Haliburton Todd glances after them, and sees them enter a room on the first landing. He walks on a few steps slowly, hesitates, then quickly turns back. In a moment he is knocking at the door, which had been opened for the children. The knock is answered by the boy.

"I beg your pardon, my little man," says Mr. Todd. "I am a stranger to you; but I should like to see your mother if she is not engaged."

"Come in, sir," says a voice within.

It is the voice of a lady. Her face is pale and anxious, but her manner is quiet and self-possessed.

"It is a curious errand that brings me here, madam," says Mr. Haliburton Todd; "but I trust you will pardon my boldness and grant my request. These children of yours chanced to be standing with me in front of the same placard, announcing the oratorio to-night; and I heard enough of what they said to know that they have a rare appreciation of good music. I have come in to see if you will let me take them to the Music Hall this evening."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Ben.

Ruby's eyes plead, but the mother's face is grave. "Your offer is extremely kind, sir," she says at length, slowly; "and the thing you propose would give my children great pleasure; but—"

"You do not know me," Mr. Todd supplies. "That is true; and of course a wise mother would not commit her children to the care of an entire stranger. Here's my card,—Todd & Templeton, Mattawamkeag Maine,—but that proves nothing. However, I'm not going to give it up so. Let me see; I wonder if I know anybody you know in this big city. Who is your minister?"

"We attend, at present, St. Matthew's church, of which Mr. Brown is rector."

"What is his first name?" "John, I think."

"John Robinson Brown?"

"Yes; that is the name."

"Cor-rect!" ejaculated Mr. Todd, triumphantly, with a distinct hyphen between the two syllables of his favourite interjection; "that fixes it. What luck this is! I know your minister perfectly. He has been up in our woods fishing every summer for five years, and we are the best of friends. Can you tell me his residence?"

"I know," cries Ben. "He lives next door to the church, on Chaucer street."

"All right. Let the boy run up to his house after dinner, and see whether Mr. Brown indorses me. I'll drop in on him this morning. If he says so, you'll let the children go with me to-night?"

"I know no reason," answered the mother, "why they may not go. You are very kind."

"Kind to myself, that's all. But I shall be obliged to ask your name, madam."

"Johnson."

"Thank you, Mrs. Johnson. I will call for the children at half-past seven. Good morning!"

Mr. Haliburton Todd bows himself out with a beaming face, and leaves sunshine behind him. He pauses a moment on the landing. The door of the room adjoining the Johnsons' stands open, and he observes that the room is vacant. He steps in and finds a glazier setting a pane of glass. It is a pleasant room, with an open fireplace; the rear parlor-chamber of an old-fashioned house, and it has been newly papered and painted. It communicates with the sitting-room where the children and their mother live.

"Is this room rented?" he asks the glazier.

"Guess not."

"Where is the agent?"

"Number seven, Court street."

"Thank you!" Mr. Haliburton Todd glances around the room again, nods decisively, and hurries down the stairs. What becomes of him for the next hour we will not inquire. A man is entitled to have a little time to himself, and it is not polite, even in stories, to be prying into all the doings of our neighbors.

The next glimpse we get of him, he is sitting in the study of the rector of St. Matthew's, explaining to that gentleman what he wishes to do for these two little parishioners of his.

"Just like you," cries the minister. "But who are the children?"

"Their name is Johnson, and they live in a tenement house on Denison street, number forty-five."

"Ah, yes. Their father was the master of a bark in the African trade, and he was lost on the west coast a year and a half ago. Nothing was ever known of his fate, excepting that a portion of the vessel bearing its name, 'Ruby,' was washed ashore, somewhere in Angolia, I think. They had a home of their own, bought in flush times, and mortgaged for half its value, but in the shrinkage everything was swept away. They have lived in this tenement now for nearly a year, supporting themselves by sewing. I suspect they are poor enough, but they are thoroughly independent; it is hard to get a chance to do anything for them. You seem to have outflanked them."

"Oh, no; I'm not much of a strategist; I moved on their works and captured them. It's my selfishness; I want to hear Thursby and Cary with those children's ears to-night, that's all. And if you will kindly write a little note, assuring the mother that I will not eat her children, the boy will call for it. And now, good-morning. I shall see you next summer in the woods."

The minister presses his friend to tarry, but he pleads business, and hurries away.

Now he mysteriously disappears again. After a few hours we find him seated before the grate, in his cozy room at the Parker House; the telegram has gone to Cincinnati with the bad news that he is not coming; the oratorio tickets have been purchased; dinner has been eaten; there is time for rest, and he is writing a few letters to those nephews and nieces who know, by this time, to their great grief, that they will not see Uncle Hal to-morrow.

Meantime, the hours have passed cheerily at the little rooms of the Johnsons, on Denison street; for, though the kindness of their unknown friend could not heal the hurt caused by the hardness of their greedy employer, it has helped them to bear it. Ben has brought from the rector an enthusiastic note about Mr. Todd, and the children have waited in delighted anticipation of the evening. Presently, at half-past seven the step of their friend is on the stair, and his knock at the door.

"Come in, sir," says Ben. It is a very different voice from that of the boy who was talking at Jackman & Company's entrance a few hours ago. "This has been a day of great expectations here," says Ben's mother. "I do not know what could have been promised the children that would have pleased them more. Of music they had a passionate love from infancy, and they haven't heard much lately."

"Well, they shall have to-night the best that Boston affords," says Mr. Todd. "Now, you must tell me your name, my boy. We want a good understanding before we start."

"Ben, sir, is what my mother calls me."

"Ben Johnson, eh? A first-class name, and a famous one. Correct!" laughs Mr. Todd. "And now, will the little lady tell me her name?"

"Ruby, sir, is all there is of it," answers the maiden.

"Well, Ruby," says Mr. Todd, "your name is like the boarder's coffee; it is good enough what there is of it, and there's enough of it, such as it is. Now, you want to know what to call me. My name is Uncle Hal; That's what a lot of boys and girls out West would have been calling me to-morrow if I hadn't missed the train; and if you'll just let me play, to-night, that I'm your uncle, I shall have a great deal better time."

So they go off merrily.

Music Hall is packed from floor to topmost gallery. On either side of the great organ rise the ranks of the chorus, eight hundred singers; the orchestra is massed in front; the soloists are just entering, to take their places at the left of the conductor.

"There's Miss Cary," cries Ruby, eagerly.

Mr. Todd points out to the children the other singers whom they do not know, and, while he is speaking, the click of Mr. Zerrahn's baton is heard, the musicians of the orchestra lift their instruments, and the glorious strains of the overture burst upon the ears of the wondering children.

But no wise historian will try to tell about this evening's music, nor how Ruby and Ben enjoyed it. More than once, in the rush of the great choruses, Ben finds himself catching his breath, and there is a rosy spot all the while on Ruby's cheek and a dazzling brightness in her eye. Mr. Todd watches them, momentarily; he listens, as he said, with their ears as well as his own, and finds his own pleasure trebled by their keen enjoyment.

"Oh, mamma," says Ben, as she tucks him into bed, "it seemed, some of the time, as if I was so full that I couldn't hold another bit. When Miss Thursby sang that song—you remember Ruby. What was it?"

"I know that my Redeemer liveth," answers Ruby.

"Yes; that's the one;—when she sang that, I thought my heart would stop beating."

"But what I liked best," says Ruby, true to her old love, "was one Miss Cary sang about the Saviour, 'He was despised.'"

"It was all very beautiful, I know, my darlings," answers the mother, "but you must forget it now, as soon as you can, for it is late."

The next morning, Ruby is awakened by the stirring of her mother. "Oh, mamma," she says, softly, putting her arms about her mother's neck, "I had a beautiful dream last night, and I must tell it to you before you get up. I dreamed that Miss Thursby was standing on a high rock on the seashore, singing that song, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and when she came to that part, 'In the latter day I shall stand upon the earth,' I thought that dear papa rose right up out of the sea, and walked on the

water to the shore, and that Mr. Todd took him by the hand and led him up to us, and just as he flew towards us, and caught you in his arms, I woke up."

The desolate mother kisses the daughter with tears, but cannot answer. Beside that dream the dark and stern reality is hard to look upon. Yet, somehow, the child's heart clings to the comfort of the dream.

Presently her eyes are caught by an unwonted display of colours on a chair beside the bed. "Oh, what are these?" she cries, leaping to her feet.

"They are yours, my daughter."

"Look here, Ben! Where did they come from, mamma? M-m-y! Oh, look! look! And here are yours, Ben!"

By this time the drowsy boy is wide awake, and he pounces with a shout upon the treasures heaped on his own chair, and gathers them into his bed. A book and a nice silk handkerchief for each of the children, an elegant morocco work-box stocked with all sorts of useful things for Ruby, and a complete little tool-chest for Ben; The Christmas *St. Nicholas* for both, with a receipt for a year's subscription, and a nice box of sweetmeats to divide between them—these are the beautiful and mysterious gifts.

"Who brought them, mamma?" they cry, with one voice.

"Your friend, Mr. Todd. He had two packages concealed under his coat, when he came for you last night, and when he rose to go I found them on the floor beside his chair, one marked, 'For the Girl,' and the other, 'For the Boy.'"

"What makes him do such things?" asks Ben, solemnly.

"Good-will, I think," answers his mother. "He seems to be one of these men of good-will of whom the angels sang."

"Anyhow, I'd like to hug him," says the impetuous Ben. "Did he say he would come and see us again?"

"Perhaps he will, in the course of the day. He said that he should not return to Maine until the evening train."

Suddenly Ruby drops her treasures and flings her arms again about her mother's neck. "You blessed mamma!" she cries tenderly, "you've got nothing at all. Why didn't some of the good-willers think of you?"

"Perhaps they will, before night," answers the mother, speaking cheerfully, and smiling faintly. "But whether they do or not, it makes the day a great deal happier to me that my children have found so good a friend."

It is a merry morning with Ruby and Ben. The inspection of their boxes, and the examination of their books, makes the time pass quickly.

"Somebody's moving into the next room," says Ben, coming from an errand. "I saw a man carrying in a table and some chairs. Queer time to move, I should think."

"They are going to keep Christmas, at any rate," said Ruby, "for I saw them a little while ago, bringing up a great pile of green s."

"Perhaps they've hired the reindeer-team to move their goods," says Ben.

Then, answers his mother, "they ought to have come down the chimney instead of up the stairs."

So they have their little jokes about their neighbours, but the children

have moved once themselves, and they are too polite to make use of the opportunity afforded by moving day to take an inventory of a neighbour's goods.

They are to have a big dinner. The turkey, bankered after by Ben, is not for them to-day, but a nice chicken is roasting in the oven, and a few oranges and nuts will give them an unwonted dessert. While they wait for dinner, the children beseech their mother to read to them the Christmas story in *St. Nicholas*. "It means so much more when you read," says Ben, "than it does when I read."

So they gather by the window; the mother in the arm chair, on one arm of which Ben rests, with his cheek against his mother's—Ruby sitting opposite. It is a pretty group, and the face of many a passer-by lights up with pleasure as his eye chances to fall upon it.

It is now a little past one o'clock, and Mr. Haliburton Todd, sauntering forth from his comfortable quarters at Parker's makes his way along Tremont street, in the direction of Court. He is going nowhere in particular, but he thinks that a little walk will sharpen his appetite for dinner. When he approaches Scollay's Square, his eye lights upon a man standing uncertainly upon a corner, and looking wistfully up and down the streets. The face has a familiar look, and as he draws a little nearer, Mr. Todd makes a sudden rush for the puzzled wayfarer.

"Hello, Brad!" he shouts, grasping the man by the shoulders.

"Hello!" the other answers, coolly, drawing back a little; then, rushing forward: "Bless my eyes! Is this Hal Todd?"

"Nobody else, old fellow! But how on earth did I ever know you? Come to look you over, your not yourself at all. Fifteen years, isn't it, since we met?"

"All of that," says the stranger. "Let's see; you've been in the seafaring line, haven't you?" says Mr. Todd.

"Yes, I have, bad luck to me!" answers his friend, with a sigh.

"Oh, well," says the hearty lumberman, "the folks on shore haven't all been fortunate. Where's your home, now?"

"Just what I'm trying to find out."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow," says the stranger, with quivering voice, "my ship was wrecked a year and a half ago on the west coast of Africa; I reached the shore, only to fall sick of a fever, through which my cabin-boy nursed me, for a long time I was too weak to move; finally, by slow stages, we made our way to Benguela, there we waited months for a vessel, and, to make a long story short, I reached Boston this morning. I went to the house that was mine two years ago, and found it occupied by another family,—sold under mortgage, they said. They could not tell me where I should find my wife and children. I went to the neighbours who know them, some of them had moved away, others were out of town on their Christmas vacation. Of course, I shall find them after a little, but just where to look at this moment I don't know."

Mr. Todd has listened to this story with a changing expression of countenance.

When his friend first mentioned the shipwreck, a sudden light of intelligence sprang into his eye, and his lips opened, but he quickly shut them again. He is greatly interested in what he hears, but he is not greatly pained by it. His friend wonders whether Hal Todd has lost some of the old manly tenderness of the academy days.

"Well, Brad Johnson," he cries, drawing a long breath, after the short recital is ended, "this is a strange story. But, as you say, this family of yours can be found, and shall be. Come with me. There is a police station down this way."

The two men walk on, arm-in-arm, in the direction of Denison street.

"How much is there of this missing family?" asks Mr. Todd.

"There's a wife and two children,—I hope," answers the other. "The best woman in the world, Hal, and two of the brightest children. Sing like larks, both of 'em. Bless their hearts!" says the sailor, brushing away a tear; "I thought I should have 'em in my lap this Christmas day, and it's tough to be hunting for 'em in this blind fashion."

"It is tough," says the lumberman, chcking a little. He has stopped on the sidewalk, on Denison street, just opposite Number 45. He lays his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Look here, Brad Johnson," he says, "we are going to find that wife and those children pretty soon, I suspect. And you've got to keep cool. D'ye hear?" "What do you mean?" gasps the sailor.

The eye of Mr. Haliburton Todd is quietly lifted to the window of the second story opposite. His friend's eye follows, and falls on the picture we saw there a little while ago,—the mother intent upon the book, the children intent upon the mother's face.

There is no outcry, but the father lifts his hands, as if to heaven, staggers a little, and then plunges across the street. Mr. Todd is after him, and seizes him by the collar just as he reaches the foot of the stairs.

"Hold on, man!" he says, decisively.

"You mustn't rush on that woman in this way. You'd kill her. She's none too strong. Wait here a few moments, and I'll break it to her."

"You're right," answers the father, pressing his hands against his temples, and steadying himself by the wall. "But you won't keep me waiting long, will you?"

Mr. Haliburton Todd knocks at the door, and is let in by Ben.

"Oh, Mr. Todd how good you are! Thank you a hundred thousand times!" cry both the children at once.

"Well, I'm glad if you've enjoyed my little gifts," he answers. "But I've been thinking that your good mother ought to have a little of the cheer of this Christmas as well as you."

"Just what we said," answers Ben.

Mrs. Johnson colors a little, but before she can speak, Mr. Todd goes on. "Pardon me, madam, but what your minister told me yesterday of your affairs has led me to take a deep interest in them. How long is it since your husband left home?"

"More than two years," answers the lady.

"You have had no direct intelligence from him since he went away?"

"None at all, save the painful news

of the loss of his vessel, with all on board."

"Have you ever learned the full particulars of the shipwreck?"

"No; how could I?" Mrs. Johnson turns suddenly pale.

"Be calm, I beseech you, my dear lady. I did not suppose that you could have heard. But I met just now, in the street, an old friend of mine—and of yours—who knows a good deal about it. And I want to assure you, before he comes in, that—that the story as it reached you—was—was considerably exaggerated, that is all. Excuse me, and I will send in my friend."

Mr. Todd quickly withdraws. The color comes and goes upon the mother's face. "Merciful Father!" she cries, "what does it all mean?"

She rises from the chair; the door that Mr. Todd has left ajar gently opens, and quickly closes. We will not open it again just now. That place is too sacred for prying eyes. It is a great cry of joy that fills the ears and eyes of Mr. Haliburton Todd, as he goes softly down the stairs, and walks away to his hotel.

An hour later, when the shock of the joy is over a little, and the explanations have been made, and father and mother and children are sitting for a few moments silent in a great peace, the nature of the human boy begins to assert itself.

"Is n't it," ventures Ben, timidly, as if the words were a profanation, "is n't it about time for dinner?"

"Indeed it is, my boy," answers his mother; "and I'm afraid our dinner is spoiled. Open the oven door, Ruby."

Ruby obeys, and finds the poor, forgotten chicken done to a cinder. "Never mind," says the mother. "Our dinner will be a little late, but we'll find something with which to keep the feast."

Just then, there is a knock at the door opening into the new neighbour's apartment.

"What can they want?" says Mrs. Johnson. "Perhaps, my dear, you had better answer the knock. They are new-comers to day."

Mr. Johnson pushes back the bolt and opens the door. The room is hung with a profusion of Christmas greens. A bright fire blazes on the hearth. A table in the middle of the room is loaded with smoking viands. A smiling coloured waiter, with napkin on arm, bows politely when the door is opened.

"Et you please, sah, dinnah is ready, sah!"

"Whose dinner?" demands Mr. Johnson.

"Your dinnah, sah. De folks's dinnah 'n dis yer front room. It was order'd fo' dem."

"Where was it ordered?"

"Copeland's, sah."

"Who ordered it?"

"Gen'l'm'n with gray' ulcerated coat on, sah; I sean kim kim up t' ver room 'bout 'n hour ago. I was to git it all ready 'n call you jes' half-past two."

"Another of Todd's surprises," exclaims Mr. Johnson. "Well, my dears, the dinner is here; and we should be very ungrateful not to partake of it with thanksgiving."

What a happy feast it is! How the laughter and the tears chase each other around the table! How swiftly

the grief and dread of the two desolate years that are gone, fly away into a far-off land!

Bye and bye, when the cloth is removed, and they are seated around the open fire, Ruby says, musingly: "Papa, did you really and truly know Mr. Todd when you were a boy?"

"Certainly, my darling, why do you ask?"

"I can't quite think," says the girl, "that he is a real man. It seems to me as if he must be an angel."

While she speaks, the angel is knocking at the door. They all fly to him, the father hugs him, the mother kisses his hand; the children clasp his knees.

"Help! help!" shouts the hearty lumberman. "I didn't come here to be garroted."

Then, with much laughing and crying, they tell him Ruby's doubts concerning him.

"Well," he says, merrily, "I may be an angel, but, if so, I'm not aware of it. Angels are not generally addicted to the lumber business. And you needn't make any speeches to me, for I haven't time to hear 'em. Fact is, this has been the very reddest of all my red-letter days; the merriest of my Christmasses; and you people have been the innocent occasion of it all. And I'm not done with you yet. I'll have you all up to my lumbercamp next summer; there's a nice cabin there, for you. Pine woods'll do you lots of good, madam. Great fishing there, Ben! You'll all come, won't you? It's almost train-time. Good-bye!"

And before they have time to protest or to promise, Mr. Haliburton Todd is down the stairs, rushing away to the station of the Eastern Railroad.

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Pleasant Hours:

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLKS:

Rev. W. H. WITHROW, D.D., Editor.

TORONTO, DECEMBER, 23, 1883.

OUR NEW PAPER.

THE first number of HOME and SCHOOL, has been received with a general chorus of approval. It is admitted, to be the most beautiful Sunday-school paper ever published in the Dominion, and we hope to still further improve it. The Metropolitan Sunday-school, Toronto, had the honour of giving the first order for the new paper. This school, under the able superintendence of Alderman Boustead, is thoroughly



HOUSE IN NORWAY 334 YEARS OLD—From Du Rhailu's "Land of the Midnight Sun," in the "Methodist Magazine" for January.

loyal to all the institutions and publications of our Church. While already taking large quantities of BANNER, PLEASANT HOURS, and SUNBEAMS, it gives an order for 300 copies of HOME and SCHOOL. We hope that every school in the country that can at all afford it, will give as large an order as possible. Where two copies of the same paper now go into a family, by substituting HOME AND SCHOOL for one of them, double the amount of reading will be obtained for the same cost.

CHRISTMAS GREETING.

"A MERRY Christmas" to the hundred thousand of readers of PLEASANT HOURS! That's what I hear the Christmas bells saying as their merry voices ring out, strong and clear, through the frosty air. A merry Christmas? Why not? Is it not the anniversary of the world's greatest joy-day? It speaks to us of the Bethlehem stable, the manger, the Virgin's babe; of the wondering shepherds, the glad angels, the curious wise men from the East; of the birth of Jesus our Saviour, who laid down His heavenly crown and sceptre, and joined Himself to a soul and body like yours and mine, that He might redeem us, make us good, and, therefore, happy for ever and ever. Who can help being happy on so glad a day as this? Yes, Christmas is—must be—the gladdest, merriest, happiest day in all the glad some year to those who know it to be the birthday of Jesus. Let us therefore all join in singing this Christmas carol:

This is the day when holy men,  
Led onward by a star,  
To bow before the Newly-Born,  
Came from their home afar.

Their gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,  
In lowly love they brought;  
Each gift with precious meaning stored  
Beyond the giver's thought.

In tribute to the kings of earth  
Their gold the nations bring;  
Therefore they offered gold to Him,  
Our own anointed king.

Before the mercy-seat of God,  
Rich frankincense was poured:  
And so they brought Him frankincense,  
To own Him God and Lord.

In myrrh embalmed in olden time,  
The dead were wont to lie:  
Then myrrh was token meet for Him  
Who came on earth to die.

And little children as we are,  
We, too, would come and lay  
Our gold, and frankincense, and myrrh  
Before His feet to-day.

We'll run and do His kingly will,  
Whene'er that will is told  
By parents, teachers, brethren, friends:  
Obedience is our gold

Three times a day we'll meekly kneel,  
To thank His loving care,  
And ask Him to protect us still  
Our frankincense is prayer.

Let disappointments in our hearts  
No evil tempers stir;  
We'll bear them as He bore His cross:  
For patience is our myrrh.

A merry Christmas? Certainly, Have we not all our pretty love gifts and our nice feasts to be merry about? God gave His Son on the first Christmas day to feast our souls. Our little gifts to each other, and our festive tables, are only types of that greatest of gifts, that richest of all feasts. Led us be glad, then, over our love tokens, and our nice dishes, because they all tell of love—our own friends' love and God's love to us, in giving us kind friends, and best of all, in the gift of His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

A COURTEOUS old gentleman, being told a very tough story, said: "Since you were an eye-witness, I suppose I must believe you; but I do not think I'd have believed it if I had seen it myself."



A CHRISTMAS SCENE IN NORWAY.—From Du Chaillu's "Land of the Midnight Sun," (in the "Methodist Magazine" for January.

CHRISTMAS IN NORWAY.

THE winter, and especially the Christmastide, is the great season for merry-making in Norway. The farmers rest from their labours, the dairy work is light, the ample leisure is turned into a high festival. Every hamlet and farm is busy, in preparing for Christmas; baking, brewing, buying Christmas presents, or putting up the Christmas sheaves for the birds as shown in our pictures. Great cartloads of grain are brought to the towns for this purpose, and every one, even the poorest buys a sheaf. Even the horses, cattle, sheep and goats, get a double supply of food on this Christmas festival. The day before Christmas, everything is ready, the house thoroughly cleaned, and leaves of juniper or fir strewn on the floor. Then the whole family take a hot bath in the bake house, and put on clean linen and new clothes. In the evening the house-father reads from the Liturgy or the Bible. Often the houses are illuminated, vigil is kept during the night, and the people flock to the church by torch light.

Early on Christmas morning, the voices of children are heard singing—

"A child is born in Bethlehem,  
That is the joy of Jerusalem,  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

The boys and girls, have a jolly time in out of door sports, especially snow shoeing. The snow shoes are very unlike ours in Canada, being from six or seven to ten or twelve or even fourteen or sixteen feet long and pointed at the ends. They are made of thin fir wood, four or five inches wide. They are fastened by a loop over the foot, and are not raised from the snow, but slid along the surface. The difficulty is to keep them parallel. The natives, Du Chaillu says, can travel with them ten or fifteen miles in an hour.

Often on Christmas eve, a Christmas tree, and dance and song, and love-gifts and mirth, celebrate the happy day. Even the stranger is not forgotten, and friend Paul received many kindly tokens of remembrance. The houses

are very comfortable, great porcelain stoves making them quite warm.

The domestic architecture too, is very picturesque. The houses have often broad Swiss like-galleries and balconies, overhanging eaves, carved doorways and porches, as shown in our frontispiece and in the cut on this page.

The stabbur, or isolated building shown in both pictures, is very odd looking, with overhanging stories, and sometimes outside stairs. It is employed for keeping wearing apparel or stores, probably to ensure protection in case of fire. It is also richly carved. Within the dwelling house, one sees quaint rooms, where are found great bedsteads reached by a high step, and dressers built into a recess in the wall, carved shelves on which is kept the bible, and a few sacred books, cupboards with old china, and often on the walls or mantels, or over the bed, a pious inscription or verse of scripture. The cut on the opposite page, shows the carved porch of a house over 300 years old.

OUR new paper, HOME AND SCHOOL, now ready, and our increasingly popular PLEASANT HOURS, will be sent post-free to any address for 30 cents each, or the two to one address for 60 cents. This, we think, is the cheapest reading in the world. Each of these papers gives during the year as much reading as a 12mo. book of 800 pages for the low price of 30 cents per single copy; in quantities, less than 20, 25 cents each; over 20 copies 22 cents each.

The Editor of PLEASANT HOURS, begs to acknowledge with thanks, the receipt of \$1 from Miss E. A. Sterling Maxwell, for the Hospital for Sick Children. Also the receipt of \$1 from a class of six boys in the Tilsonburg Methodist Sunday-school for the Crosby boat, "as a slight token of respect for Mr. Crosby's missionary enterprise." God bless the boys! That is the way, to grow up in sympathy with the grandest of causes.

TRUTH belongs to the man, errors to the age.

ONE LITTLE EMPTY STOCKING.

BY JOSEPHINE POLLARD.

ONE little empty stocking,  
Left of the pretty pair  
We hung by the chimney-corner  
With tenderest love and care.  
The year has brought us sorrow,  
Bitterest tears and pain;  
And we have no smiles of greeting  
When Christmas comes again.

One little empty stocking  
To mind us of all our joys,  
The shouting of happy voices  
At finding the pretty toys.  
But now we have lost our darling;  
The dear little feet are still;  
And there's only an empty stocking  
That Santa Claus cannot fill!

Some little empty stocking  
There's time enough now to fill  
With many a loving token  
Pressed down with a right good will.  
For selfish it is, and sinful,  
Thus over my loss to repine,  
When I know there are other darlings  
Not as safe, nor as rich, as mine.

And ever what God has taken  
Some recompense surely brings:  
For out of the gloomy shadows  
We're lifted on angels' wings,  
When we open our hearts in the sunshine,  
Of infinite love and grace,  
And feel that a Christ-like presence  
Has taken the dead child's place.  
—Illustrated Christian Weekly.

THE COMING OF THE KING.

BY MISS MARY A. LATHBURY.

OUT of the east the wise men came,  
Out of the north, the south, they rise:  
Out of the west with hearts aflame,  
The light of a star in their lifted eyes.  
From heart to heart with a quickened life,  
From eye to eye through the land afar,  
The message flies with a whispered joy,  
"He cometh, He cometh! behold his star!"

CHORUS.

Tell the tidings to lands afar!  
He cometh! He cometh! behold his star!

Not as a babe to Bethlehem,  
Not to a cradle, but to a throne;  
Crowned with a glory, and not with thorns,  
The Lord is coming unto his own!  
Eyes that see him, the vision tell!  
Hearts that love him, awake and sing!  
The holy kingdom within has come—  
The poor in spirit behold their King.

CHORUS.

Hearts that love him, awake and sing!  
Tell to Zion, "Behold your King!"

NEW YEAR PLEDGES.

BY CONTENT GREENLEAF

IT was a very serious question which was undergoing discussion in Ruth's cheerful bedroom, one morning, about a week before New Year's day. In this council of three, as in every larger body, there were different degrees of interest shown, a warm enthusiasm, a languid indifference, and a firm opposition. Faith, as usual, was quietly pleading her cause, brave, because she knew she was right; the girls had long ago pronounced her a visionary philanthropist, but were always ready to be benefited by her love for helping others. Ruth was not quite so sure; in truth she was always open to conviction upon any subject, and frequently congratulated herself that she had friends to think for her. Gay had her mind quite settled; in fact it always was settled upon every point, from the most desirable shade for a new ribbon to the most knotty point in political economy or politics. She now expressed herself, with a very decisive tap of her boot heel on the fender.

"I never could do such a thing, girls, never—it is only one of Faith's impossible schemes, not in the least practical. It sounds very plausible, everything does when judiciously stated; but when we come to actually do anything of that kind it is a very different matter from planning it. Most assuredly, it is officious and unladylike to try to force our own views upon others in this way. You know how I feel on the temperance question, but I can not expect others to adopt my opinions, and I am not in favour of taking advantage of an occasion when we show hospitality, to try to force my convictions upon them," and Gay settled herself in the big arm-chair, as if she felt better after taking so decided a stand.

There was a pause after this emphatic statement, for the two listeners had no reply ready, and were a trifle unsettled in their conviction by Gay's decided manner; earnestness and decision carrying weight, even in a cause of doubtful value. These three young ladies, or "girls" as they called themselves, were now out of school; and consequently were allowed to give considerable time to the social enjoyments of their little town. They were great friends, and found many subjects upon which they wanted to compare notes, so that visits were frequently exchanged. This year they were, for the first time, to receive formal New Year calls, and had decided that the pleasure could only fully be enjoyed together. Many were the consultations held about dress, flowers, refreshments, and all the multiplicity of other cares, with which the feminine mind delights to burden itself. To-day it was a subject of grave importance that had called them together, and the morning was slipping away without their coming to any decision.

"What does your mother say, Ruth?" at last asked Faith, "and what did you tell her?"

"Yes," exclaimed Gay, "let us hear how this scheme sounds when stated plainly, free from Faith's earnestness: she is entirely too persuasive to state any proposition fairly."

"For shame!" exclaimed Ruth, "Well! I told mother that you

accepted her invitation to use our parlors on New Year's Day, and she was much relieved to think the house would be open without any responsibility on her part. I told her how we expected to manage the table and everything, no wine of course, and I explained that Faith proposed we should have an album ready and ask for the autograph of every caller; that on the first page of the album that we should have a short pledge written, and all who were brave enough to favor us with autographs bound themselves to abstain from any drink that would intoxicate."

"Pledged for one year," added Faith.

"Oh! yes, I told her if we had the pledge we would make it for a year, because then so many more would be willing to sign; she said she thought it was rather an innovation but *might* do. She gave her consent freely, trusting to our judgment not to do anything unwise. Papa said he thought it might be just as well to make the pledge for all time, although we might get only a few names; but a few pledges for a lifetime are worth a great many promises made for only a year."

"Oh! no," said Faith earnestly, "there are so many of our friends who do not know that they are in danger. If they would only stop and think, only have a year to consider, they would see their peril. And it is not an evidence of weakness to be unwilling to bind ourselves for a long time; we always like to try a new plan before we adopt it. So many have stumbled into sin and are hardly aware that they have done so. If they get back into the right path for a year there is hope for them. It is not the experienced temperance workers that we want to bind tighter, but we want to get the attention of the undecided and thoughtless."

"That sounds very reasonable, Faith," said Gay thoughtfully, "but who, for instance? I cannot think of any one who is so weak as not to know his danger."

"Ah! that is the trouble, the ones who are beginning to drink moderately, taking a glass occasionally, are the ones of whom we should be least likely to hear; we may help where we least expect to do it."

"Did your mother say anything else, Ruth?" asked Gay.

"She said something about our being liked, and seemed to think it would not give offence."

"That is another thing I thought of," said Gay, "I know if we carry out such a plan, so many will think it quite proper because our parents stand well in society here; and are we not taking advantage of those who have a regard for social distinctions?"

"No," said Faith, "I think it is only using for good one power bestowed on us. If social standing enables us to do anything of this kind we are not justified in standing back as we otherwise would."

"Your arguments are quite overpowering, my dear," said Gay rising and wrapping her shawl around her. "Come, we must go, and let Ruth get at her music."

So the two friends took leave, and as they walked toward home, Faith renewed her conversation with better hope of success because there was only one to convince. She used sometimes to say that it would not be impossible to convince the world of any truth if the world could be taken one at a time.

"You will think of it seriously, please, Gay," said Faith.

"Now, Faith, I have thought of a compromise. You and I are going to receive calls at Ruth's, you have the album and ask for as many autographs as you please; I will give you mine, but do not ask me to take any active part."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Faith, "that would never do, I am quite willing to take any amount of work, and bear all the blame of failure, but I must have the weight of your influence. I need you to countenance the plan. I have never forgotten Miss Foster's illustration to show how much more we might accomplish through united efforts."

"What was that? dear, patient Miss Foster was so bountiful with her advice all through our school-days, that I have never been able to sort up her wisdom and label it for future use."

"She used to say, 'What if each little drop of water in the Falls of Niagara would think, "I am so tiny and insignificant, it surely is not so important that I should go down, I am so small my weight is almost nothing." Suppose half the individual drops could think the same, and act upon it, what a weak failure there would be instead of grandeur; but all unite and go down with a plunge and what a power it is.' Now, Gay, I believe all that Christian people have to do to work a reformation, is to come down, each with whatever weight of influence he or she has. It may be influence gained by learning, wisdom, or goodness; perhaps it is only the influence of the one more which goes toward making up a majority; but, whatever it is, they ought to come down."

"I'm convinced against my better judgment," said Gay laughing; "go on, Faith, and I will uphold you in anything, or rather come down, if you prefer to so express it," and with a cherry "Good-morning," Gay turned toward home.

New Year's morning dawned bright and clear, and at an early hour the three friends met to give the finishing touches to the already tastefully arranged parlors; flowers bloomed in pots on mantel and bracket, almost making one forget that their season was so long passed. On an unpretending little table, in the bow window, lay the book which had been the cause of so much anxiety, a good-sized autograph album, handsomely bound. The first page was tastefully decorated with a wreath of forget-me-nots, the work of Gay's skillful hands; here was written the pledge, which was the result of some thought on Faith's part:

JANUARY 1st, 1881.

We, the undersigned, do hereby promise to abstain from the use of any intoxicating drink, for one year. May God help us!

It was Gay's wish that the wording of the pledge should be very simple, explaining that she had an aversion to seeing a simple statement buried in a weight of words; a promise was a promise, just as surely as it only consisted of "Yes," as if it was composed of a multiplicity of statements.

Friends began to come early, and the first experience was a trifle discouraging, but not a disappointment. Mr. Simmons, whose lavender gloves betrayed the man of fashion, was the first caller; he was easily entertained

and seemed reluctant to leave the merry group. It had been decided that Faith should be the first to ask for an autograph, this she did in few words, and was greeted by the inevitable, "Aw! indeed," followed by "Ah! quite unique. I see you have not yet been favoured, so really, ladies, you must excuse me." And he bowed himself out.

Faith's disappointment was lost in amusement at Gay's indignation at the rebuff; "Quite unique, indeed, afraid to sign his name first, that is always the way with shallow minds, so much afraid of getting out of the ordinary rut."

Many callers followed, a large majority signed, and varied were the motives which led to their doing so, the minister's ready acquiescence and his cordial: "This is encouraging, to see you carry the temperance question into social life, may you be blessed in this effort," was a strong contrast to the hesitation of one young school friend, who coloured deeply as he handed back the book, saying, "I don't half believe I can keep it, but I will try."

"And this," said Faith, gravely, pointing to the last few words of the pledge, "is our assurance that you will not try in vain."

Some signed because they felt under obligations to the young ladies for hospitality shown in the past, others because they did not want to appear disobliging; one, because (as he afterward said), "It seemed to be the thing to do," one or two, because they could not resist the appealing look from Ruth, and were willing to do even greater things to win her favour.

Several had never before been asked to sign a pledge; they did not belong to the class who frequent temperance meetings, and would have considered it a rudeness for any one to have thrust a pledge before them. They were not even moderate drinkers, but might have been called occasional drinkers. To some, it was a revelation that young ladies of culture, who wore fashionable clothing, and could entertain well, were really interested in a reformation so often associated only with age, staid manners, and rather dull prayer-meetings.

But even with so much encouragement, Faith was not quite satisfied; the one for whom she had watched all day so anxiously, did not call.

Ralph Emerson had married Faith's only sister but three years before, and already had appeared the shadow of that cloud which darkens so many households. It was not a trouble which could be told of, or with which a friend could openly sympathize. Oh, no! any one would have scouted the idea of Ralph's being actually drunk—so coarse a word could hardly be used in connection with so polished a gentleman, and yet—Faith knew too well the secret of her sister's heavy eyes and failing spirits; and as she greeted her brother-in-law rather late in the afternoon, it was with a sinking heart that she noted his flushed cheeks.

"A long call, ladies, because my last one," he said, gaily; "I have reserved my greatest treat for the last."

For more than half an hour he lingered, and still Faith lacked courage to make the request, which devolved on her, the others being engaged. At last, rather hesitatingly;

"Ralph, I want a New Year's autograph; may I have it?"

"Certainly, my most amiable sister." "But there are certain conditions attached—see!"

He read the pledge slowly, then closed the book impatiently.

"So this is a trap set for me!"

"No, Ralph," said Faith earnestly; "believe me I meant no offence. We have asked every one who called to-day, and see the names."

He glanced through the book; his friends most of them—and surely in so goodly a company, he would not be ashamed to see his name; not one reformed drunkard among them; a few he knew would often take a social glass, but if they had now debarred themselves for a year of that enjoyment, why not join them?

After ten or fifteen minutes' hesitation, during which, with ready tact, Faith was seemingly occupied in another part of the room, he took the pen and hastily wrote his name; then, as he bade an abrupt "Good-bye" to the girls, to Faith he said aside:

"We will not discuss this; no words, remember; I have a special aversion to scenes."

How deep was Faith's thankfulness! As the girls sat round the fire late that evening, and discussed the day's pleasure; Ruth counted the names and triumphantly announced the number.

The names, as written, might be quickly counted, but who can estimate the result of this one act of the girls, the power of the mighty wave just set in motion, the real, earnest thoughts started, the good resolutions formed, the possible evils checked, because taken in season.

#### CHRISTMAS PICTURES.

CHILDREN'S voices—soft, low voices,  
Singing sweetly in the street,  
Heedless of the cold that pinches,  
Or the chilling snow and sleet;  
While they tell the wondrous story  
Of their Saviour's love to all,  
How He left His throne of glory  
For the humble cattle stall;  
And it seems that angel whispers  
Blend with the loved words again,  
Of the children's Christmas anthem,  
"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

'Tis a fireside quiet, lonely,  
For the joy that passed away:  
Death has come to claim a treasure  
Since the last bright Christmas Day.  
And one sits in silent sorrow  
Opposite the vacant chair,  
Thinking that with each to-morrow  
She must miss his presence there;  
Till the children's happy voices  
Reach her from the window, when  
In their song her heart rejoices:  
"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Home, where all are well and merry,  
Little children full of glee,  
Decked with the holly berry  
Ever, look that they can see:  
Friends have met, a long time parted,  
Plenty crowns the winter store;  
And they are the lightest-hearted  
Who did not forget the poor.  
From the church the bells are sending  
Out the welcome news again,  
With the children's voices blending:  
"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Welcome Christmas! dear old Christmas!  
For our lives seem closer drawn—  
Closer drawn in joy or sorrow,  
On our much-loved Christmas morn.  
Welcome all that brings us nearer  
To our Saviour's Home above!  
Welcome all which makes thee dearer,  
Sweet "old story" of His love!  
Young and old, and high and lowly,  
Join to raise the song again!  
Sing with angels pure and holy,  
"Peace on earth, good-will to men!"  
—Sunday at Home.

THE BEST CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY KATE M. FRAYNE.

"PLEASE, grandmamma, tell us a story," cried the children one and all, from three-year-old baby Alice to Harry so grave and tall, "We'll be just as still, and listen to every word you say;" Thus coaxingly pleaded the sweet voice of merry, mischievous May.

Then grandmother looked up smiling, from her seat in the old "arm chair," with a twinkle of pride in her eye as she gazed

On her grand-children rosy and fair, "Well, dears, what shall the story be? You've most exhausted my store; Grandmother scarcely knows what to tell. That she has not told before.

"Oh, anything you tell, gran'ma, is nice as nice can be;" And the little eager faces looked up in expectant glee; When Harry spoke out gravely — "Grandma, please tell us the story of the Babe in the lowly manger, Born in Bethlehem far away."

"I've heard you tell that story just often and often before, but it never grows old or tiresome, and I love it more and more." Then grandmother told the story that her heart held of priceless worth, the story of glad redemption for the sinful millions of earth.

And the little upturned faces grew strangely bright to hear again that wondrous story in accent tender and clear, while the children, from baby Alice to Harry so grave and tall, pronounced the grand "old story" the very "best of all."

A CHRISTMAS SONG.

BY MRS. M. F. BUTTS.

CHRISTMAS Day, holy day, Day of all the year, Green with holly, glad with smiles, Full of human cheer. The sun goes low, love rises high; Cold is the mother earth; But tender thoughts, and fragrant deeds, And fresh hopes have their birth

Christmas Day, holy day, Welcome once again! With gifts and garlands, songs and bells, We usher in thy reign; But under all our careless mirth, We think of what we owe To Him who came that Christmas Day Long centuries ago.

Christmas Day, holy day, Thy gifts have little worth, If we with outward sign of joy Forget that wondrous birth. The world breaks out in winter bloom, To make for Him a crown, Who left the realm of truth and peace, And to our world came down.

Christmas Day, holy day, Thy voice says far and wide: All who have lands or love, some part Of what thou hast, divide. Bound to the poor is bound to Christ, "The poor ye have always" He maketh thus, to hearts that love, All time a holy day.

Christmas Day, holy day, Day of all the year, Green with holly, glad with smiles, Full of human cheer. The sun goes low, love rises high; Cold is the mother earth, But tender thoughts, and fragrant deeds, And fresh hopes have their birth.

THE announcement of the METHODIST MAGAZINE for 1883, is omitted from this number of PLEASANT HOURS. See last number for our splendid programme and premium. Several schools have taken the Magazine in quantities of from 4 to 10 for several years. They find it cheaper and more popular, than library books. Write for our special rates to schools and for specimens, which will be sent free on application.

CHRISTMAS MISSIONARY OFFERINGS.

WE wish every teacher and scholar in our Sunday-schools the happiest Christmas and New Year that they have ever known. We know that our faithful, hard-working teachers have all the past year through been sowing the seeds of happiness in their own souls and the souls of others, from which we trust they shall reap a rich harvest of reward. We wish at present, however, to tell our younger friends how they may make the Christmas and New Year season doubly happy to themselves by the consciousness of doing something for the cause of God, and at the same time gladden the hearts of many a missionary's family sorely straitened on account of their narrow income, and also help to send the privileges of the Sunday-school and the preaching of the gospel to many who have them not.

God is opening doors of usefulness in different parts of our own country, among new settlers in the backwoods, the fishermen in Newfoundland, the French in Quebec, the Indians in the great North-West, and the nation of Japan, faster than the Church is prepared to enter them. Everywhere the cry is heard, "Come over and help us." The fields are waving white unto the harvest on every side, and the Church of God is bidden to thrust in her sickle and reap this harvest of immortal souls, and it may not without guilt neglect this solemn command.

Now all this requires money. These people to whom our missionaries minister are many of them very poor and can do little for themselves. But what little they can do they do cheerfully. At one mission, at French River, nearly a hundred miles from the nearest white missionary, and only receiving his visits about once a year, a single family contributed one year \$26. Now we want every girl and boy in our schools to feel interested in these Home, Indian, and Japan Missions. Have your missionary box, and always put in it some of your pocket-money, especially at Christmas time. Every school, every class should have one of the boxes. The Rev. Dr. Sutherland at Toronto, or your minister will be glad to give them if applied to.

Our schools in the past year have done nobly, raising \$21,560, an increase of 5,737 in two years. Can we not have another increase like that or greater? We hope that all our Sunday-schools will put forth a vigorous and systematic effort to make the juvenile Christmas offering this year larger than it has ever been before. In recognition of God's great Christmas gift to all mankind, let them lay upon His altar an offering that shall declare their zeal, their diligence, and their desire for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Now for a general and a generous effort for the largest Christmas offering ever presented by the schools of our Church to the cause of Christian missions.

"GIVE me 100 preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen. Such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon earth." — Wesley.

CHRISTMAS BALLADS.

BY ALEXANDER R. THOMPSON, P. D.

THE night our Saviour Christ was born, — So ancient legends say, — The bird that crows to call the morn, Crows every hour till day, As it he sought, with quivering throat, The world to waken wide, With thankful heart and hymn to note The holy Christmas-tide

How grew the legend, who can tell? But one thing we may know, That nothing e'er before befell This weary world below, Like that same Christmas-gift of love, Of purest, fairest worth, That came of old from heaven above To sinful men on earth

The night the King was born, the stars Shone down on Bethlehem, As jewels flash through golden bars From out a diadem, But suddenly their radiant fire Grew pale and dull and dim, When came from heaven an angel-host, To sing a Christmas hymn.

Such music never yet had rung On mortal ears till then, As rung when holy angels sung "Goodwill and peace to men." Such winsome glory never came Before on mortal eyes, As came when they, with feet of flame, Came trooping down the skies.

And if on that first Christmas-time, This lost world back to call To hope and God, in sweetest chime The bells of heaven rang all, Would it be strange, if echo sweet Of that transcendent strain Should run o'er earth with footsteps fleet, And answer back again?

Sing, angels, never cease to sing, Ye first-born of the sky: Cry, every herald of the King, His glorious advent cry: But angel from the heaven above, Or herald of the morn, Could never sing the song of love As men: — that Christ is born

THE BABE IN THE MANGER.

THE roughly-hewed trough of stone under the shelving rocks in the hills about Bethlehem once contained the world's hope. Here lay a little helpless infant, the mighty Redeemer. "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger," said the angel messenger to the shepherds.

Such is the wonderful wisdom and order of God. The greatest things are brought out of the smallest. The great leader and lawgiver of Israel was found a weeping babe in the flags of the Nile. David, the renowned king, whose sling slew Goliath, and who led his armies to frequent victory, was a little prattling babe, and a merry song-inventing, but devout shepherd-boy. His son Solomon, the wisest of kings, learned to lip the first syllables of language. All the wise and great, the mighty in battle or in wisdom, once were delicate, tiny babes on their mothers' bosoms. The generation that shall carry on the business of the world is rocked in the crib to-day. The good and the wise, who shall think for and bless the race, and the criminals great and small, who shall curse the world, are the smiling cherubs that coo in cradles to-day.

About the time that Jesus lay in the manger at Bethlehem, another child was a mother's pride in a city over in Asia Minor, and another the joy of a household in Galilee. The fond mother of one called her son Saul, after the first king of Israel. The other called her babe by a name then held in honour, Judas. The one became the renowned

apostle of Jesus, Paul, the other became his betrayer.

The future greatness and glory of the world is in the germs of to-day. The forests that now cover large portions of the earth were bound up in the acorns, and nuts, and seeds of a time gone by. The flowers and fruits of next year are to-day hidden in the folds of little buds, and the great harvests that are to provide food for the millions of men, for the beasts that labour for them, and the other countless armies of living creatures, are looked up in diminutive seed-germs or in tender blades that a child might crush with its tiny hand. The ministers, the statesmen, the inventors, the scientists, the teachers, the rulers, the armies of both workers in every walk of life, are to-day brothers and sisters to the Babe in the Manger.

CHRISTMAS BELLS.

RING out, ye merry bell! Welcome, bright icicles Welcome, old holly-crown'd Christmas again! Blithe as a child at play, Keeping his holiday. Welcome him in from the snow-peak and plain.

Up with the holly bough, Green from the winter's brow, Lock up your books; leave your cares for a day.

Out to the forest go, Gather the mistletoe, Old and young, rich and poor, up, and away!

Up with the holly bough! Aye, and the laurel, now; In with the yule log and brighter the hearth! Quick, he is here again, Come with the joyous train, Laughter and music and friendship and mirth.

Up with your holly bough, High in each manor-house, Garnish the antlers that hang in the hall; Yea, and the neck of corn With a gay wreath adorn, Rich as the bloom on the cottager's wall.

Wealth has its duties now, Christian, you will allow; Think, then, ye rich, while your tables are spread, Think of the needy ones, Poverty's stricken sons, Weeping, while children are crying for bread.

Ring, then, ye merry bells! Ring, till your music swells Out o'er the mountain and far o'er the main! Ring, till those cheerless ones Catch up your merry tones, Singing, "Come, Christmas, again and again!" *Wide Awake*

THE ANGELS' SONG.

WHERE! Turn your ears earthward and not skyward. Angels sing now on the ground, not above it. A girl is injured by another, and says words of forgiveness. That is the angels singing. A boy finds his home in a snarl of contention, and says sunny, kind words. The angels sing again. Don't, Christmas night, spend your time listening at the window for a seraphic singer up in the azure, but down here say loving words, and you will make angel-music yourself. Better than sentimental star-gazing is attendance to practical duty.

ANY persons having copies of PLEASANT HOURS for Sept. 24, 1881, January 14, 1882, May 27th, 1882, or of SUNBEAM for December 19, 1881, will oblige by sending them to this office to complete file copy.

We beg to acknowledge the receipt of \$1.30 from the Maple Grove Sunday-school for sending religious reading to hospitals, etc.



**THE HOLLY.**

WREATH the holly, twine the bay,  
A garland bright for Christmas day:  
Lo, as when all the summer trees are seen  
So bright and green,  
The holly leaves their fadeless hues display  
Less bright than they,  
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,  
What then so cheerful as the holly tree?

**LESSON NOTES.**

**FIRST QUARTER.**

**STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.**

A. D. 30.] **LESSON I.** [Jan. 7.

**THE ASCENDING LORD.**

*Acts 1. 1-14.* *Commit to memory verses 8-11.*

**GOLDEN TEXT.**

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up. *Acts 1. 9.*

**OUTLINE.**

1. The Promise of the Father. v. 1-8.
2. The Farewell of the Son. v. 9-11.
3. The Prayer for the Spirit. v. 12-14.

**TIME.**—A. D. 30, forty days after the resurrection of Jesus.

**PLACE.**—Near Bethany, on Mount Olivet.

**EXPLANATIONS.**—*The former promise*—Meaning the Gospel according to Luke. *Taken up*—By ascending to heaven. *Commandments*—The command to preach the Gospel to all the world. *His passion*—His sufferings and death on the cross. *Seen..... forty days.* Not all the time, but occasionally during forty days. *Assembled..... with them*—This refers to Christ's last meeting with his disciples after his resurrection. *Not depart from Jerusalem*—Jesus wished his Gospel to commence in the place where he suffered and died. *The promise of the Father*—The promise that God the Father would send his Spirit upon the disciples. *Restore again the kingdom*—Even then the disciples expected Jesus to set up a throne like earthly kings. *Times or the seasons*—The time when God will establish his kingdom in the world. *Witness unto me*—To preach the Gospel of Christ. *While they beheld*—Christ ascended in full view of his disciples. *Taken up*—By ascending to heaven. *Two men*—Angels in form of men. *Men of Galilee*—Nearly all the disciples of Jesus came from Galilee. *Shall so come*—Jesus will at some time return to the earth. *Sabbath-day's journey*—A little less than a mile. *Upper room*—Perhaps the upper room where the last supper had taken place. *Where abode*—Where the disciples met together often. *One accord*—United, with one heart. *In prayer*—or the fulfillment of the promise of ver. 4, 5. *With the women*—Those who watched by the grave of Jesus. *The mother of Jesus*—Mentioned here for the last time. *His brethren*—Sons of Joseph and Mary, who at one time had not believed in Jesus, but were convinced by his resurrection. One of these, James, was afterward considered as an apostle.

**TEACHINGS OF THE LESSON.**

- Where do we find in this lesson—
1. A blessing that disciples of Christ may receive?
  2. A work that disciples of Christ should do?
  3. A hope that disciples of Christ may cherish?

**THE LESSON CATECHISM.**

1. To whom did Jesus appear after his resurrection? To his disciples. 2. During how many days did he appear to them? During forty days. 3. What did he promise them? The power of the Holy Ghost. 4. What did he command them to be? Witnesses in his name. 5. What did Jesus do at the end of forty days? He ascended to heaven.

**DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION.**—Christ's second coming.

**CATECHISM QUESTION.**

4. What did the Prophets foretell concerning the coming of Christ?  
Among other things which the Prophets foretold concerning the coming of Christ, they declared that a Saviour should be born of the stock of Abraham, of the house of David, and in the town of Beth'chem.

A. D. 30.] **LESSON II.** [Jan. 14.

**THE DESCENDING SPIRIT.**

*Acts. 2. 1-16.* *Commit to memory vs. 1-4.*

**GOLDEN TEXT.**

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. *Acts 2. 4.*

**OUTLINE.**

1. The Tongue of Fire. v. 1-3.
2. The Tongue of Speech v. 4.
3. The Tongue of Wonder. v. 5-13.
4. The Tongue of Power. v. 14-16.

**TIME.**—A. D. 30, ten days after the ascension of Jesus.

**PLACE.**—Jerusalem.

**EXPLANATIONS.**—*Day of Pentecost*—A day fifty days after the passover, when a feast was kept in memory of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. *They were all*—The disciples of Jesus, numbering one hundred and twenty. *A sound from heaven*—From above as if falling from heaven. *Cloven tongues*—Fire in the form of tongues, to show that the Gospel was to be like a tongue speaking to men. *Sat upon each*—As a sign that all received the blessing of power. *Filled with the Holy Ghost*—Their heart with joy and their tongues with testimony by the power of God. *Devout men out of every nation*—The Jews born in foreign lands often went to Jerusalem to live, or to visit during the feasts. *When this was noised*—When this sound was heard. [Revised Version] The sound, as of the wind heard through the city, drew together a crowd. *Galileans*—Nearly all the first believers in Jesus came from Galilee. *Every man in our own tongue*—The miracle was in speaking, not in hearing. *Parthians, etc.*—These were the principal peoples of the eastern Roman empire. *Wonderful works*—They told of God's power in salvation through Jesus Christ. *Others mocking*—Some who did not know what the foreign words meant. *Full of new wine*—As if the disciples of Jesus were drunk, and spoke words without meaning. *Peter, standing up*—The leader of the apostles. *With the eleven*—The other apostles standing beside him as witnesses to prove what Peter said.

**TEACHINGS OF THE LESSON.**

- How does this lesson show—
- That Christ's promises are sure to be kept?
  - That Christ's people should be of one heart?
  - That Christ's people will have power?

**THE LESSON CATECHISM.**

1. On what day did the Spirit descend upon the disciples? On the day of Pentecost. 2. How long was this after Christ's ascension? Ten days. 3. In what form did the Spirit descend? In tongues of fire. 4. What was its effect upon the disciples? They spoke in other languages. 5. Who heard them speak with tongues? Jews from every land. 6. Who spoke to the people that came together? Simon Peter.

**DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION.**—The power of the Holy Ghost.

**CATECHISM QUESTION.**

5. How did an angel give notice of his coming? The angel Gabriel gave notice of the coming of Christ, by foretelling the birth of John the Baptist to prepare the way of Christ; and he told the mother of Jesus, that she should bring forth the Son of God.

