

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM!

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie! Above the deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by; Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

—Philips Brooks Christmas Carol.

WHY THE CHIMES RANG.

There was once, in a far-away country, a wonderful church. It stood on a high hill in the midst of a great city; and every Sunday, as well as on sacred days like Christmas, thousands of people climbed the hill to its great archways, looking like lines of ants all moving in the same direction.

At one corner of the church was a great gray tower, with ivy growing over it as far up as one could see. I say as far as one could see, because the tower was quite great enough to fit the great church, and it rose so far into the sky that it was only in very fair weather that any one claimed to be able to see the top.

Now all the people knew that at the top of the tower was a chime of Christmas bells. They had hung there ever since the church had been built, and were the most beautiful bells in the world. Some thought it was because a great musician had cast them and arranged them in their place; others said it was because of the great height, which reached up where the air was clearest and purest; however that might be, no one who had ever heard the chimes denied that they were the sweetest in the world.

But the fact was that no one had heard them for years and years. They were Christmas chimes you see, and were not meant to be played by men or on common days. It was the custom on Christmas Eve for all the people to bring to the church their offerings to the Christ-child; and when the greatest and best offering was laid on the altar, there used to come sounding through the music of the chimes the Christmas chimes far up in the tower.

"Both of us need not miss the service," said Pedro, "and it had better be I than you; and oh! if you get a chance, Little Brother, to slip up to the altar without getting in any one's way, take this little piece of silver of mine, and lay it down for my offering, when no one is looking. Do not forget where you have left me, and forgive me for not going with you."

In this way he hurried Little Brother off to the city, and winked hard to keep back the tears, as he heard the crunching footsteps sounding farther and farther away in the twilight. It was pretty hard to lose the music and splendor of the Christmas celebration that he had been planning for so long, and spend the time instead in that lonely place in the snow. The great church was a wonderful place that night. Every one said that it had never looked so bright and beautiful before.

At the close of the service came the procession with the offerings to be laid on the altar. Rich men and great men marched proudly up to lay down their gifts to the Christ-child. Some brought wonderful jewels, some baskets of gold so heavy that they could scarcely carry them down the aisle. A great writer brought his book, and last of all walked the king of the country, hopping with all the rest to win for himself the chime of the Christmas bells.

But still only the cold wind was heard in the tower, and the people shook their heads; and some of them said, as they had before, that they never really believed the story of the chimes, and doubted if they ever rang at all. The procession was over, and the choir began the closing hymn. Suddenly the organist stopped playing as though he had been shot, and every one looked at the old minister, who was standing by the altar, holding up his hand for silence.

Not a sound could be heard from anyone in the church, but as the people strained their ears to listen, there came softly, but distinctly, swinging through the air, the sound of the chimes in the tower. So far away, and yet so clear the music seemed—so much sweeter were the notes than anything that had been heard before, rising and falling away up there in the sky, that the people in the church sat for a moment as still as though something held each of them by the shoulders. Then they all stood up together and stared straight at the altar, to see what great gift had awakened the long silent bells.

But all that the nearest of them saw were the childish figure of Little Brother, who had crept softly down the aisle when no one was looking, and had laid Pedro's little piece of silver on the altar. —By Raymond MacDonald Alden.

—They are all good enough, but the WATCHMAN is always the best.

Santa Claus' Sweetheart.

[Concluded from last week.]

Chapter VII. The Peace of God.

TOWARD midnight somebody stepped close to the improvised bed and stood looking down with troubled eyes at the child curled up among the blankets there. The light from the low fire cast an occasional flickering flame upon the tiny segment of cheek just visible above the wooden covering, like a snowdrop peeping out of a mass of old bracken, and on the floating strands of hair that had lost their golden sheen in the semiobscurity.



Stood Looking Down With Troubled Eyes.

An hour or so earlier the men had gone to their bunks in the long loft overhead, and their heavy breathing now proclaimed the fact that they were resting from their labors. Every one in the house was sleeping but Shawe. Even old Jerome, who sat huddled by the side of the little one, nodded at his post. He had maintained the right of watching by supremacy of his years and her evident preference for him, jealousy putting aside all offers that his vigil be shared. He stirred now and opened his eyes, staring into the face of the man above him.

"What is it?" he demanded, with a low, savage growl. "I couldn't sleep." Shawe whispered back, "for thinking of the ones who are mourning for her—her mother and uncle. The father isn't home, she said. Don't you remember—'God bless far-away daddy?' So he won't be troubled. But the others—they ought to know. We've had all the Christmas sport, and they nothing but black misery and bitterness. They ought to know quickly."

Old Jerome's hand fluttered above the little head, half fell to it, then was drawn reluctantly back. "Ye-es; they'd orter know," he said dully. "But how? Who is she?" He shifted his position, averting his eyes. "I've he'n thinkin' that p'raps she's hebd to take him on his face value, so to say. He ain't a gabber 'bout himself, but gen'-al—gen'-al—an' oncom-mon quick witted inter the bargin'."

"That's nonsense, man. Look at her sleeping there as human as we are, though with a difference. I tell you she has kith and kin, and their hearts are bleeding for her at this moment. I'm going to find them."

breath and moved nearer the fire. Jerome, watching him furtively, saw that he was fully dressed to go out. "Waal," he muttered slowly after a time, "ef ye be so sot on goin', ye're goin', I s'pose. P'raps ye're right. Somehow I was only thinkin' from my side an' hebdn't got roon' to the mother's. Mebbe an' ol' codger like me never would ha' got roon'—can't say. Here's my hand."

It was an unusual demonstration, but Shawe showed no particular surprise, everything being a little out of the ordinary that night. He grasped the extended hand warmly, then let it drop and turned away, bending again for a moment over the sleeping child.

"Wish I were going to hear her laugh over the stockings," he said half to himself. "Got a wife an' fambly?" Jerome asked. "No," the other returned. "Thought mebbe ye he'd, 'count o' yer thinkin' how the mother 'd feel Mebbe ye he'd onced."

"Then ye know how turrible masterful the kids are. Strange, ain't it? Mine he'd got so ez he could patty cake, ye understand. Lord, there warn't never a sight like it—never! Thought fust 'twas a kinder fool thing the mother 'd learned it, but bless yer I didn't think so long; 'twas the purties s'ght—"

Shawe moved cautiously across the room and paused at the door to look back at the old man softly clapping his palms together. Something in his glance recalled Jerome to a sense of his surroundings. He got up in his turn and joined his companion. "Ye'll keep an eye out fer them deers, won't yer?" he whispered anxiously. "Christmas eve they all kneel in the woods an' look up to he'n, ye know. That's Injln talk roon' here from way back. Some o' the oldest fellers swear their folks seed the thing done. Can't say 'xactly ez I b'lieve it myself, but 'twould be a purty s'ght—an' anyways ye jes' watch out. Waal, luck to ye, lad; luck to ye."

"Oh, you'll see me again, never fear!" Shawe said lightly to cover the other's concern. "I'm a bad penny. So long!" He let himself out into the night, closing the door speedily and with as little noise as possible, but quick as he had been a blast of the nipping air filled the room. Jerome hurriedly drew the blankets closer about his little charge; then he stooped to the fire, coaxing it into a brighter glow.

"Fer a bad penny," he mumbled as he went back to his place, "Shawe rings oncommon true. There ain't nary of us ez would ha' thought o' doin' what he's a-doin'—nary a blessed one of us. I swan he's diffrunt somehow—kinder apart, but square—square. Never knowed nothin' 'bout Shawe—he'd take him on his face value, so to say. He ain't a gabber 'bout himself, but gen'-al—gen'-al—an' oncom-mon quick witted inter the bargin'."

left on earth, so wide and empty were the spaces about him. The great vault overhead, in which the moon and stars rode calmly, was out of his pygmy reach. Presently, as the trees grew sparser and the road showed its slighter depression through the plain of snow lying beyond like some frozen sea, he became conscious of life and motion close at his side. With the instinct of the woodland creatures he held himself perfectly tense and waited. Then right across his path there lumbered a huge, clumsy shape, its breath showing like smoke on the moonlit air. Suddenly great drops of moisture stood out on Shawe's face as if it were midsummer, and his weight of furs had become intolerable. He had never felt fear before, yet now panic gripped him. It was not the thought of physical hurt that appalled him, but rather the sense of the utter futility of his endeavor. So the end had come, and over there, still very far away, a little child's mother was sobbing. He could almost hear her moans.

He stirred his hand from his pocket to his belt and grasped the butt of his pistol, drawing it forth swiftly. It might not be too late! His finger was



Right Across His Path There Lumbered a Huge, Clumsy Shape.

firm as iron as it touched the trigger, but the next instant the beast slouched noisily into the shadows beyond. There was no other sound; had been no other sound. The cartridges lay unused in their chambers. Shawe lowered his hand. He had not been dreaming, he told himself. He could swear to that. And the animal was no creature of fancy. He had seen it quite plainly; had felt its breath as it passed; had met the dull stare of its eyes. It was real—as real as he was at that moment—yet he had not fired because there had seemed no need. The beast had simply disregarded him. Then suddenly Shawe laughed aloud, not boisterously, but very gently—the way you do sometimes when something has happened that seems almost too good to be true and the quick tears rush into your eyes. I think perhaps they were in his also.

"It's the peace of God," he said softly to himself; "the peace of God!" For on the moment he remembered the old tradition he had heard in many lands that on the night before Christmas, from the day's close to the day's coming, there is no slaughter anywhere among the beasts; that the fiercest and most savage of them all are as harmless as doves to one another and even to their natural enemy—man. He put his pistol back into his belt, unsuspectingly glad that no shot of his had broken the holy truce. It was useless to try to account for what had happened—to believe in the legend or to laugh it away and attribute the animal's indifference to some natural cause. The whole experience—dream or reality—left him throbbing with a sense of gratitude that nothing had interfered with his mission. The thought seemed to lend him greater activity, as if his mooccasin feet had suddenly become winged. There could be no loitering anywhere while the mother mourned for her little one, her voice crying vaguely, vainly, through that wonder space of time when, because of another little child, God's peace wrapped the earth close.

Chapter VIII. "You—You Humphrey?"

THERE were no landmarks discernible. Terry would have recognized certain ones, as he would also some of the lumbermen, but to Shawe, who was a stranger, the whole country was unfamiliar. All he could do, therefore, was to lessen the distance step by step, knowing that while he kept the road he could not miss his destination. Yet he never lost heart, nor was he particularly tired. As boy and man, much of his time had been spent in the open. He was used to hardships,

rough weather and great exertion. The present undertaking seemed slight compared to others he had known. Presently the white light of early dawn crept faintly up—little Peep o' Day he's called—a tiny fellow, truly, to be sent out to fight the darkness and yet so persistent and undaunted that every moment he glowed more confidently at his task and grew bigger and bigger with his efforts. The moon had looked scornfully at the coming of such an adversary, but now she paled visibly and called in her routed army of moonbeams, while below the sleeping world laughed here and there at the contest, stirring out of its slumbers. As soon as his duties were accomplished the little champion stole away, losing himself in the brightness that filled the sky, and made it and



Back in the Shanty the Little Child Was Already Waking.

the land look like tinted silver, but nobody missed him, for the morning was at hand. There was a gorgeous, rosy flush along the east melting into purple, out of which the sun came up like a wonderful flower, opening slowly, first pink, then yellow, then red—and it was Christmas (ay!)

Shawe's eyes gladdened at the sight, though he did not pause. He couldn't—oh, now less than ever—now, he must hurry—hurry. Back in the shanty men's but the little child was already waking. He knew, and her glee was filling the house, but in her home others were waking, too—they had not slept—and listening in vain for the music of her laughter. He must hurry! So he kept on, but somehow, though he was beginning to be very tired, the going was much easier. Joy comes with the morning and new hope; all the doubts and fears of the night disappear. They are some of the foes little Peep o' Day vanquishes so triumphantly. Shawe couldn't feel depondent in that beautiful world while the still morning brightened around him, especially when every step brought him nearer his goal. He laughed like a boy and shouted out "Merry Christmas" though there was no one by to answer his greeting, but the clear cold air bore it wide, and it helped to swell the chorus going up all over the earth.

He ran a few paces, so wonderfully light hearted had he grown, and flung out his arms, clapping them against his body to warm himself; then he sobered down—outwardly. No body would ever have supposed that the tall, fur clad figure, with head bent a trifle and only a bit of his face visible between his big cap and high collar, was the bearer of joyful news. For one thing he was walking quite stolidly, and your happy messengers are always winged, and for another he was looking neither to left nor right. Wasn't he? Then why did he start suddenly and throw back his head, laughing up again at the sky? Why? Because just in front of him there was a house—an ugly, squat little house, the glass in its windows twinkling in the sun. He drew nearer, and his heart, that had almost instantly rushed into his throat, fell back to its proper place with a most discouraging thump. The house seemed uninhabited—deserted—as if the people who had lived there had grown tired of being so far from the settlement and had gone back to be with their kind, perhaps to stay there always, or at least over this day of festivity. It was impossible to associate a merry Christmas with this sober, grownup abode. A closer approach, however, revealed a small thread of smoke issuing from the chimney, but otherwise the general air of dreariness about the place—its loneliness, its emptiness, starting windows—chilled Shawe more than the winter night had done.