CHRISTMAS CAROL.

There's a story olden, golden,
Laden with the sweetest peace,
Of a stranger in a manger,
Couched on autumn's rich increase,
Robed not in sable, for a stable,
With its mire and dust clad walls,
Formed a shelter, where did swelter
Cattle in their stifled stalls.

Then from heaven's azure riven,
Blazed a star of radiance bright;
Glorious, victorious,
It paled the other stars of night.
Then it glimmered, gleamed and shimmered,
O'er the town of Bethlehem;
And brighter, nearer, richer, clearer,
Burned the star of glory then.

Above the stable's pointed gables
Did that star of heaven stand;
While adoring, wealth outpouring,
Knelt the men from Judah's land.
Softly saying, 'mid their praying,
While their eyes with tears were dim,
From afar we've seen his star,
And have come to worship him!
Then came winging, sweetly singing,
Hosts on hosts of cherubim,
"Glory, glory, hear the story!
Peace on earth, good will to men!"

—O. H.

MOTHER'S MENAGERIE.

BY OLIVE HARPER.

Some sixty years ago Madison street in New York was one of the most aristocratic streets in the city, and on both sides it was built with stately stone mansions, with wide halls, immense parlors and large handsome rooms, and each had a garden in the rear. Now the wealthy old Quaker families who once inhabited them are gone and the whole street has degenerated until it is known as a "tenement house district," and these old houses are full of ragged, half starved children; pale, wretched women, and a generally honest but rough class of men. Every house has a family in every room, where they eat, work and sleep, and even where there is the most sobriety there is still enough of noise, unhealthiness and misery. In most of them men's drunken curses and women and children's shrill screams are heard almost hourly.

In the attic room of one of the handsomest of these old houses there lived a widow with her two children, Ruth and Robert. No words can picture the bare desolation of that room, but in spite of the bitter poverty so apparent it was neat and clean. The young mother was born in this house, as had been her father, and though she now owned nothing on earth but the wretched furniture about her, and she could barely pay the rent of this cheerless attic, her heart clung to the old house and here she staid. Her father had died suddenly, as had his father before him, and Abby, his only child, had married a man who was unworthy his trust and in a short time he had dissipated every dollar they possessed and then had died, mercifully for his wife and little children.

Abby Hicks had tried to earn a living since then, but with delicate health and two helpless babies she could not do much. Like the great majority of women, she had no resource but her needle, and she found employ in a shirt factory, and by shaving night and day as long as her poor little hands could hold the work, she managed to keep her children and herself alive. Their clothes were the last of those of better days, and were almost falling off them from sheer age, though the patient little fingers had patched and darned them over and over, and her heart sank as she wondered where she could get more.

Her grandfather had been a thrifty old man, and everybody had supposed him rich; but when he died it was found that this house and a few thousand dollars, which was at interest, was all he had, and it was never quite understood; but no amount of searching in mirrors or banks brought to light anything more and the search was finally dropped, though the question was often discussed.

It grew too dark to sew and not quite dark enough to light the lamp, and this hour the little mother usually took to run out and do her marketing for the next day; and so telling the children to lie still in bed, for it was bitterly cold up there so near the roof, she took her threadbare shawl, and throwing it around her started out.

SHE BENT BEFORE THE WIND.

The snow was falling in great soft flakes and lay thick upon the pavement, and she bent before the wind as she made what haste she could. As she walked along she wondered for a moment at the holiday aspect of the street, and then she suddenly remembered, with a great pang, that it was Christmas Eve, and two sudden tears rolled from her eyes and trickled slowly down her cold cheeks.

Everybody she met, even in that poor location, seemed to have something in their hands—toys, cheap and tawdry, it is true, but still something to bring joy to a child's heart—but this poor little woman could buy nothing, not even so much as a bit of candy, for stern necessity had laid too strong a hand upon this desolate little family for the spending even of one penny on anything but food, fuel and rent. Choking back the unruly sobs that would mount up the little woman at last reached the butcher's shop where she dealt, when she had anything to buy with, and here she bought a soup bone for ten cents, a carrot, a turnip and two potatoes for five cents, and then as the fat butcher's fatter wife put them in a paper bag she slyly added two rosy apples from a barrel and two big red onions, and the butcher being busy just then selling a fine turkey to the proprietor of a boarding house did not see it.

"For the babbies, ma'am, with my love," said the jolly woman, "and I wish it was more."

Abby Hicks stood a moment irresolute, with the red spots of shame burning in her cheeks, for never before had she accepted a gift, and yet her heart was glad for her children and lighter for the womanly sympathy which she felt had actuated this meager gift.

"Thank you," was all she could trust herself to say, and she hurried away, and from there she went to the little corner grocery where her wants were supplied when accompanied by cash. Here she bought a five cent loaf and a half of coal.

"Nothing else?" asked the grocer's clerk. "We have some fine turkeys and cranberries; chickens, too, first rate Philadelphia dry picked; raisins, apples, jellies, celery—nothing at all?"

"No, thank you," said Abby, hurrying away.

The coal had taken her last cent. She got out again into the street on her way back and hurried onward, only anxious to get back to where she could weep her heart out in her woe, for where is an agony keener for a mother than to deprive her children of the joy that is rightfully theirs on Christmas day? Dear little Robbie! He would hear the other children blowing their tin trumpets and beating their drums, and his sturdy little heart had always desired one and the other by turns. And good, gentle Ruthie! How her motherly soul had longed for a real doll! Not the old rag doll, but a real one, with fair hair and blue eyes. And this mother had promised long ago that she would write a long letter to Santa Claus and tell him what good little children they were, and now they would grieve over his neglect. What should she do? She had nothing to sell that they could by any possibility spare. Everything had been sold long ago that could bring anything at all; and now, to add to her despair, a huckster's wagon, loaded with cheap toys, stopped just in front of her, and the strong langed hucksters began crying out their wares. Again she quickened her pace, and went on blindly up the stairs to her miserable home, all the while her heart nearly bursting with its agony as memory pictured this home as it had been only ten short years ago. Yes, on this very anniversary, and she dressed in white satin, with pearls and beautiful laces, was the envied beauty of the great ball. Where now were all those brilliant lights, the flowers, the servants, her sweet faced mother and noble father?

THE MENAGERIE.

All were gone, and she left alone to battle with such a hard world. Had it not been for those two little children up stairs the icy river would have soon closed her book of sorrow.

She reached her room. The children were fast asleep, and she lighted the lamp and sat down by the little stove.

"If we starve," she said, "I cannot work to-night."

By and by mechanically she went about and put the little room to rights, and hung the children's worn clothing over the chair-back, and took the meat for the next day's dinner and supper from its bag. The vegetables lay upon the table, with the apples. These she wiped softly and then sat down again, looking at them in a dream. Suddenly she gave a nervous little laugh, saying:

"I will. It will amuse them at any rate."

Then she took a knife and piece of kindling and in a little while cut it in small sticks, and these she counted until she had the number she needed, and set to work.

She found the two potatoes adapted to her plan, which was to make horses of them by sticking four legs, a tail and two ears into them. Treated the same way the two red onions made rather awkward but pretty colored cows, and the turnips became a tiger and the carrot an alligator.

These made quite a little menagerie when set upon the table in a position to attract the children's attention the first thing in the morning, and a red apple was thrust into each well-darned stocking and they were hung upon the board which served for a mantelpiece.

Thus out of nothing mother love devised a bit of Christmas for her little ones, and when this was done, somehow her heart was lighter and she blessed God for the inspiration and that she had her children and health, and thanked him while she lay down beside the two pretty if pale children.

The noise of drums, trumpets and children's shouts in streets and hall waked the children almost before daylight, and they began to ask each other and their mother what it was all about, and she told them that it was Christmas, and lying then for once idle during the daylight hours she told them all the sweet story and then they began to wonder if Santa Claus had been to them, and they bounced out of bed to see.

The apples were very rare and beautiful to them, but the menagerie of wonderful animals surpassed anything they ever dreamed of, and as the mother told them:

"You see, dears, they are nicer than any wooden toy animals could be, for we can play that they are real, truly animals and we can kill them and dress them and cut them all up into little bits and cook them by and by just as the butchers do."

"Oh, yes!" said Ruthie in ecstasy.

"I don't want my ollumgater cut up," declared Robbie, stoutly. He was pacified, and the children played contentedly all the morning with their animals, though it required the constant service of mamma to replace broken legs, horns and tails, and the children did smell rather strong of onions; still they were happy and her heart lightened. But when the time came for the final part of their play, Robbie would not allow a single one of his precious "mammies" to be sacrificed, and at last he became so obstreperous that his mother was obliged to punish him by shutting him into a good sized closet which had always stood between the chimney and the outside world, but at that time there were but three wooden houses and a few trees there.

The two women put their heads together and finally decided that they could at least make a plum pudding, but in the little "store" there were no raisins, nothing but some dried apples. These were put to soak over night and on Christmas morning they were chopped into small bits, and with the eggs and a plentiful supply of molasses, flour and suet, a big pudding was put into a bag and over the fire to boil. This success stimulated the women to try an apple pie or so, and then the women put their heads together to see what more could be done to make a Christmas dinner of cost made out of a mere nothing, and to bring to this day, though it was so unlike a little woman to faint, she was so sensible a little woman to faint, she and she knew it was her own fault as well, she felt so ashamed of the joy that Christmas brings, that she grew very much ashamed.

But, though she had found this treasure, she was not happy, for she had spent every cent she had in the world, and there was the rent to be paid in a week, and the coal was almost gone, and she had not a friend in the world to whom she could go for help, for she was a stranger in the city, and her husband had never spoken of his family, and she had never asked, for she was too proud to beg, and now she was sorry for it, for there was no one to help her in this hour of her need, and she was too sensible a little woman to faint, she knew that would do no good, but she felt very, very sick and faint, and she had not tasted a morsel of food since the day before, and she had had but little then, for she had given the best she had to make a tempting dinner for the children, and in the joy of the day she had forgotten herself, and now there was no one to care for her, besides there was no time for her to be sick, for the rent must be paid, and the coal must be had, and the children must be fed, and she must do something to earn money, and she was so dizzy she could not see, and her head was so heavy it ached so that she could not think, and she was so cold, and there was no fire, and she was so hungry, and there was no food, and she was so sick, and there was no one to care for her, and she was so poor, and there was the rent, and the coal, and the children