

# SELECT READING BY THE FOR THE FAMILY.

## GLEANINGS BY THE WAYSIDE

### CHILD OF BEAUTY RARE.

O Child of beauty rare,  
O mother chaste and fair—  
How happy seemed they both, so fair  
beyond compare!  
She in her infant blest,  
And He in conscious rest,  
Nestling within the soft, warm cradle  
of her breast!  
What joy that sight might bear  
To him who sees them there,  
If, with a pure and quiet untroubled  
eye,  
He looked upon the twain, like Joseph  
standing by.

—Goethe.

### CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM.

No place in all the world has a greater interest in the Christmas season than Bethlehem. The normal population of the town, where Christ was born, is less than 5,000, but during Christmas week it becomes a great cosmopolitan center of 50,000 or 60,000 souls, all eager to pay homage to the place hallowed by the Saviour's birth.

In Bethlehem people are brought face to face with the wonderful scenes which are but feebly known to the rest of the world. Here they may see the place where the three wise men of the east halted after their long journey. Here they worship the shrine inclosing the manger in which Christ was born.

They walk along the same road followed by the Virgin Mary in her journey to the ancient city. They see buildings and ruins which the eyes of the infant Christ rested upon. The tiny city, crescent shaped and beautiful to look upon, teems with the realities which the rest of the world celebrates.

### THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY.

In the Holy Land at the Christmas season the place of greatest interest is naturally the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, erected on the spot where Christ was born. It is said to be the oldest Christian church in existence, having been built more than fifteen centuries ago by St. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. Repairs were made later by Edward IV, of England. The roof was originally composed of cedar of Lebanon, and the walls were studded with precious jewels, while many lamps of silver and gold were suspended from the rafters. Immediately beneath the nave of the church is a commodious marble chamber, constructed over the spot where the manger is said to have stood, and reached by a flight of stone steps, worn smooth by the tread and kisses of multitudes of pilgrims. The manger is represented by a marble slab a couple of feet in height, marked at the head with a chiseled star, bearing above it the inscription in Latin, "Here was Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary." At the foot are several altars, where Mass is celebrated daily, while a score of hanging lamps shed a fitful light over the apartment.

### THE HOLY BABE.

O Bethlehem! sweet Bethlehem!  
We long to sing of thee;  
How royally thy diadem  
Crown's all the life to be!  
For heaven hath nothing rarer  
Than the Blessed Babe, who lay  
Within its walls, nor fairer  
Than the dawning of His day.

Oh, Thy tender, mystic splendor,  
Oh, Thy regal, rosy light!  
Angels on their pinions slender  
Sweep down the night.  
Lo, they come in deathless glory,  
Yet in loving, lowly guise,  
Stoop to tell their gracious story  
To the simple and the wise.

To our shepherds and our sages  
Patiently their carols come,  
And in Bethlehem the ages  
Ever find their spirit's home.  
"Sing, oh sing, eternal praises  
To the Blessed Three in One!"  
Thus the Church her voice upraises  
On and on, till time is done.

—Caroline D. Swan, in Reg. Ex.

### CHRISTMAS IN ROME.

Here is a picture of the holy season of Christmas in the Eternal City, supplied by a correspondent of the "Brooklyn Tablet":

As the days are shortening, and the bell of the Ave Maria is ringing its earliest sounds—at five in the afternoon—the thoughts of many people in Rome are directed to the feast of Christmas that is approaching. Perhaps there is no place on the surface of this globe, after Bethlehem itself, where the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord is brought home more nearly to one than in Rome. When the traveller, . . . with proper Christian feelings and dispositions, happens to assist at the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, and when that keen, sharp, exultant tone rings out the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," uttered in the immediate vicinity of the place where the words were first uttered by the angels, and heard by the shepherds in the midst of the glory that surrounded the heavenly messengers, the emotions that the traveller feels at such a moment are not to be told in ordinary words.

But this happiness is given to very few. In Rome, however, many Americans and other foreigners pass the winter and are here for the Christmas ceremonies. One of the churches in which the Christmas devotions are most natural to one is Saint Mary Major, which possess the boards that constituted the Manger in which the infant Saviour was laid in the stable at Bethlehem. "Whilst," says Canon

Ryan, in his recently-published work on the Gospels, translated into Italian, "the Manger was brought to Rome and is preserved in the Liberian Basilica (St. Mary Major), the grotto consecrated by the Birth of Christ has become one of the places of pilgrimage most venerated in the Catholic world."

This relic of the Manger is exposed to the view of all in a crystal casket on Christmas Day, until the afternoon, when it is borne in procession in the church and then returned to its depository. This procession attracts great numbers of devout pilgrims, who seem to feel nearer to the great mystery in the presence of this relic.

But all Rome is filled with suggestions of the coming feast. Novenas begin and the prayers of the people have a foretaste of the joyous season. Then there appear in the windows of the stores the toy cribs, or "presepi," in which the figures in that marvellous scene of Bethlehem are all represented. Sometimes these "presepi" are of very artistic quality, but they do not aim at local colour, so that the scene depicted in the background is an Italian landscape, and the figures of shepherds are arrayed in sheepskin jackets and knee-breeches, just like the shepherds of the Campagna. Some of these "presepi," dating two centuries back, are most elaborate studies in the figures brought into them and the landscape constructed for them. All of them, however, seem to have originated in a profound reverence to the great mystery of Christmas, and the expression of that devotion is evident in the attitudes and gestures of the tiny figures.

In olden times, before modern fashions were introduced through the breach of Porta Pia into the Eternal City, the "pifferari," or serenaders of the Madonnas that are placed on the walls of the houses in Rome, came down from their hills in the Abruzzi, and for several days before Christmas went around from shrine to shrine playing on their flutes and bagpipes a weird, antique air and singing simple songs. The strange music of the air played and sung is very pretty. They are heard at times performed on other instruments, but then they lose the flavor of the original. They are performed as an interlude on the organs in churches. They are known as "Pastorales." Handel, in his grand oratorio of "The Messiah," has borrowed them from the "pifferari" and used them with great effect.

At Christmas time, too, the forum of the foreigner, that is to say, the Piazza di Spagna, is filled with winter flowers—in Rome flowers bloom all the year round—and great bunches of holly with their crimson berries shining out amidst the dark-green leaves; and large branches of blossoming eucalyptus, and mistletoe, with its red wax-like berries, are piled upon the Spanish steps, and at street corners, for the use and delight of the English-speaking world. And the people salute each other with the words, "Buon Natale!"—Happy Christmas, or "Buona Festa!"—A Happy Feast! And the weather is generally bright, with the sun shining warmly, so that man and nature seem united in the joy of this great and beautiful feast.

### CHRISTMAS IN HEAVEN.

If only we could roll the clouds away and look into the kingdom of God, what an ineffable scene of bliss would we gaze on at Christmas, when the birthday of Christ is celebrated! Imagine the splendor of the place, the light, the music! Behold all the actors of the event on earth—Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Gabriel, the angels of the choir, the shepherds, the three kings, Zachary and Anna, John the Baptist, and all the other blessed who were concerned in the mystery of the Incarnation. Behold, too, all others of the millions and millions in paradise.

Who can think how they commemorate the occasion? Joy is in every countenance. Rapture is in every heart. Praise and thanksgiving are in every creature's mouth. Surely Christmas in heaven must be a day of unalloyed delight.

### THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

#### SOME FAMOUS CRIBS.

One of the sights visitors to Rome at Christmas time never miss is that of the Crib of the Franciscan Church of Ara Coeli. "A famous crib," said an English Protestant writing on this subject, "is made every Christmas at this church on the Capitoline Hill, and throughout the octave of the feast children of tender years recite poems or little sermons on a platform in front of it. The infant preachers, whose ages range from 4 to 10 years, go through their task one after another without the slightest embarrassment, emphasizing their words with graceful gestures. In the crib to be seen the famous 'Bambino,' which in ordinary times is shown in a small chapel near the vestry by the sacristan.

"This 'Bambino' is an image of the Holy Child carved by a Franciscan monk in the seventeenth century out of wood taken from the Garden of Olives. The ship that brought it from Palestine was wrecked at Leghorn, but the image was miraculously preserved and brought to Ara Coeli in 1647.

"It is greatly venerated in Rome and frequently carried to the sick for their consolation. Even miraculous cures are said to have been wrought by it."

Nativity scene are designed to emphasize the fact that while it was an epoch-making event it took place among the scenes of ordinary life and belonged essentially to mankind. One of these Tyrolean cribs, in the museum for Austrian folk study in Vienna, contains no less than 256 human and 154 animal figures, while the number of buildings shown amounts to twenty-four.

In addition to the Nativity scene, however, other events connected with the earthly mission of the Saviour are depicted in a similar manner by means of figures and appropriate surroundings. Among these may be mentioned the announcement of the Saviour's birth to the shepherds, the flight into Egypt, the murder of the innocents, the twelve-year-old Jesus arguing with the doctors in the temple, the wedding at Cana in Galilee, etc. The crib is thus in a measure connected with the old time miracle play that played an important part in ecclesiastical teachings.

In a Tyrolean crib the makeshift character of the accommodations at the place of the Saviour's birth is in full evidence. The costumes of the adoring shepherds also display a desire to attain a higher degree of realism than many of these groups display.

Notably dramatic is a group in the Sicilian division of the Munich collection, depicting the massacre of the innocents conducted under the order of Herod. The savagery of the soldiers and the appealing agony of the mothers are shown in this group, which always attracts.

A close examination of any of the more elaborate cribs will impress the observer with the fact that an infinite amount of patience and skill was called for in imparting the proper pose to the innumerable little figures, so that they would naturally simulate the action represented. Whether ascending or descending stairs, climbing or mounted on rocks, perched on balustrades, peeping from doors and windows, they are alike natural. The surroundings are marvelously true to detail. Every class of building is shown, daily occupations are in full progress, the idea being to exemplify how Christ comes to the people.

From the historical standpoint, these cribs are notably interesting and valuable, and their careful study will prove an aid to the student of history, especially the history of the people, showing, as they do, the habits and customs of the period of their origin with absolute fidelity. The costumes of the figures are equally worthy of observation.

That much importance was attached to these groups in the past is demonstrated by the number of cribs and parts of cribs preserved in public and private collections. Other notable cribs are in the San Martino Museum at Naples and the Riednigen collection.

### BETHLEHEM TOWN.

As I was going to Bethlehem-town,  
Upon the earth I cast me down  
All underneath a little tree  
That whispered in this wise to me:  
Oh, I shall stand on Calvary  
And bear what burden saveth Thee!"

As up I fared to Bethlehem-town,  
I met a shepherd coming down,  
And thus he quoth: "A wondrous sight  
Hath spread before mine eyes this night—  
An angel host most fair to see,  
That sung full sweetly of a tree  
That shall uplift of Calvary  
What burden saveth you and me!"

And as I got to Bethlehem-town,  
Lo! wise men came that bore a crown.  
"Is there," cried I, "in Bethlehem  
A King shall wear this diadem?"  
"Good sooth," they quoth, "and it is He  
That shall be lifted on the tree  
And freely shed on Calvary  
What blood redeemeth us and thee!"

Unto a Child in Bethlehem-town  
The wise men came and brought the crown;  
And while the infant smiling slept,  
Upon their knees they fell and wept;  
But, with her babe upon her knee,  
Naught recked that Mother of the tree.

That should uplift on Calvary  
What burden saveth all and me.  
Again I walked in Bethlehem-town  
And think of Him that wears the crown.

I may not kiss His feet again,  
Nor worship Him as I did then;  
My King hath died upon the tree  
And hath outpoured on Calvary  
What blood redeemeth you and me!

—Eugene Field.

### THE INFANT JESUS.

Dear Little One! How sweet Thou art,  
Thine eyes how bright they shine;  
So bright they almost seem to speak,  
When Mary's look meets Thine.

When Joseph takes Thee in his arms  
And smooths Thy little cheek,  
Thou lookest up into his face,  
So helpless and so meek.

Yes, Thou art what Thou seemed to be,  
A child of smiles and tears;  
Yet Thou art God, and heaven and earth  
Adore Thee with their fears.

(Continued from Page 6.)  
THE GHOST OF A SONG.

When a little child. There was no connection either in music or sentiment between the two songs, yet somehow the variation was not incongruous. She had buried her love, and therefore the power of her love, with Harry; something that held a power, too, was trying to resurrect it. The woman up at Windyburn knew that there were some things on which she had persistently refused to think; now she felt herself realizing that her seven years of calm had been merely

drugged; that work, sleep, her several frugal pleasures, were all so many narcotic influences, that her dream of the future was a drug, too.

Something, shadowy and unreal, had confronted her with reality. It was the queerest thing in all the world—it was the ghost of a song.

The younger son had gone out of his mother's life because she had put him out. Now he had come back, if only in thought. That vague, uneasy presence of his was disturbing, especially at Christmas, which was always called the time of peace. It was like that other self, which, in all her plans, the woman had been content to reckon without, but which, newly aroused from its death-like coma, was beginning to stir and, weakly, assert itself. She was acutely conscious of the possibility of a struggle, in which the contestants resolved themselves into, on the one side, son and mother, on the other . . . She closed her eyes, as if not to see. The needles trembled and lay still.

Well, the battle would be against her; her real, honest, unshackled self. What were the odds? Two shadows summoned by a spirit voice to meet a substance, timid, and reluctant for the fight—were the machinations of a ghost to lay in ruins all the careful building of her most careful years?

Her nearness to that other self startled her. It was torture to sit there with that something that could look long and steadfastly at her, and say, "You are a coward." It seemed almost impersonal as it looked and challenged and half derided. "What have you gained?" it asked. "If anything, does it matter? Does it count in the infinite amount? Has it brought you even the shred of real happiness?"

"Away! away!" she tried to expostulate: "You are not real! Leave me—let me go my own way!"

The cry was "let," not "I will." The other self was stronger now, she knew, than the one that wanted to say "No." She had starved the mother in her, but it had not died. Harry was only a baby, and he no longer needed her. Could she be mother to a man?

She found herself considering. There was still time to take up the life of service and to tell that other Mother that, after all, perhaps she might have been wrong. Had not her tender heart suffered, too, and with an intensity that hers had never known? It was because he had no mother that Jimmy was bad, starving, perhaps dead. Dead. She shuddered. Was it worse to have no mother than no child?

She laughed with an odd little gurgle. The dainty garment slipped to the floor, to catch what dust it might. The faded woman leaned on the table, and buried her face in her hands. She did not heed that the fire was out, or that, through a chink in the window, the wind blew in piercingly cold.

An hour might have passed—she was taking no account of time—when a quick, loud rap on the outer door made her lift her head. She rose and left the room with mingled expectancy and hesitation. Opening the door, she perceived the postman's lantern, and her heart bounded when he put a thin blue envelope into her hand. Taking it into the parlour, she read the address in handwriting she had not seen for seven years. With shaking fingers she tore it open. Not dead, then, whatever else had happened!

Holding the half sheet close to the lamp, close to the holly berries that had meant an unwelcome Christmas, the mother read the few scrawled lines:

"Dear Mother,—I am sailing for Philadelphia on the 28th—working my passage. This is good-bye—I hardly think you will hear from me again. If I make anything of my life I may find friends in the new country; if not, what matter a few years more or less? Please forgive me for writing, but it is Christmas, and I cannot help myself. Good-bye. JAMES."

For a minute everything went dim before her eyes. But she quickly rallied, finding of a sudden the pressing need for action.

Good-bye—on the 28th—dear mother; the words jumbled together in her brain. They seemed to be stumbling over one another in their haste to demand her help.

Good-bye—no, not that! On the 28th—ah, thank heaven there was yet time! The telegraph office did not close till eight; she could send a message that very evening. There was his address, scribbled on the back of the sheet, as if the idea of sending it had been an afterthought. He had feared she would ignore him; the thought was painful, but she deserved to suffer.

Dear mother. That was best of all. That meant peace, joy, the end of all things past, the beginning of all to come. Her eyes sought the words again, lingering, hungry, on each clumsy letter. The scalding tears falling on them added nothing in the form of elegance, but to the starving mother they held all the beauty in the world. Outside, the wind had sunk softly to rest. The bright gold stars came out, one by one. And the ghost of a song lost itself in a low, lingering "Amen."

Half an hour later, a boyish telegraphist smiled as he sent a certain message speeding on its way to London:

"Darling Jimmy,—Come. Wanted badly by mother."

And in the church at the end of the long street a woman, smiling, too, was preparing for a happy Christmas.

—By Nicholas Riggs, in The Catholic Press.

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