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The Christmas Font

Mary Jane Holmes

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The Christmas Font

BY MARY J. HOLMES.

To Jessie

From Auntie Davis

Christmas 1865

To Allen, Embury Hayatt.

From Grandma.

March 31-1914





THE
CHRISTMAS FONT.

A Story for Young Folks.

BY
MRS. MARY J. HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "TEMPEST AND SUNSHINE," "LENA RIVERS," ETC., ETC.



NEW YORK:
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DANIEL HOLMES,
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New York.

TO
THE DEAR CHILDREN WHO HELPED TO BUY
THE CHRISTMAS FONT,
AND THE
KIND FRIENDS WHO GAVE THEIR AID AND ENCOURAGEMENT
TO THE FAIR,
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHOR.

Brown Cottage, Brockport, N. Y., 1868.

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THE CHRISTMAS FONT.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.



WHEN I was a child, no larger than some of the children who may read this little book, I brought from the Sunday school one afternoon the story of "Ruth Lee." The day was warm and bright, and the summer sunshine fell softly on the grass in the old orchard, where, beneath an apple-tree, I sat down to read about Ruth and

her half-brother Reuben, to whom she was always so kind, even when he was cross and irritable. The story was not a long one, and I read it very rapidly, growing more and more interested with every page, and wishing so much that I knew just where the brother and sister lived, and if Ruth still watched the web of cloth bleaching on the mountain-side, or Reuben in a pet threw his piece of pie over the ledge of rocks, where his good, patient sister could not get it. To me every word was true. I believed in Ruth and Reuben. I knew just how they looked,—Ruth with her grave, womanly face and soft brown eyes, and Reuben with his rosy cheeks, and round, hard head, which he sometimes bumped upon the floor when in one of his passions. I could see

him bumping his head,—could see Ruth, too, trying to quiet and soothe him. I would imitate her, I thought, and when my little baby brother screamed and kicked and wanted me to gather flowers instead of reading under the apple-tree, as I was given to doing, I would put up my books and go with him to the brook in the meadow where the little fishes glided in and out from their hiding-places and where the buttercups and daisies grew on the side of the mossy bank. I would be more like my older sister, who had borne with my childish freaks, who always gave me the fairest apple and the largest piece of cake, and who might have stood for Ruth herself.

The story was having a good effect upon

me, when suddenly I came upon a little note appended by the author, and which said the whole was a fiction; that no such person as Ruth Lee had ever lived, and I had been reading what was not true. I did not know then that but few of the Sunday-school books are literally true, and I was terribly disappointed. I felt that in losing Ruth I had lost a real friend, and, leaning my head against the tree, I cried for a few moments, thinking to myself, that when I was older I would write a book for children, which should every word be *true*. I am older now, — much older than I was then; that Sunday afternoon lies far back in the past; the sister, who might have been Ruth, is dead, and her grave is under a little pine, which whispers softly to

the wind, of the gentle sleeper below. There are more graves than hers near to the pine. The household is broken up, and children of another name than mine read under the old apple-tree in the orchard, or search for violets and buttercups down by the meadow brook. I have learned to know that stories of fictitious people, if true to life and written with an earnest purpose to do good, may oftentimes be as beneficial as stories of real people; but I have through all adhered to my resolution, that my first book for children should be *true*; and so this bright May morning, when the sky is beautifully blue, and the grass in the garden is green and fresh with yesterday's rain, I begin this story of the Font, which shall in every particular be *true*.

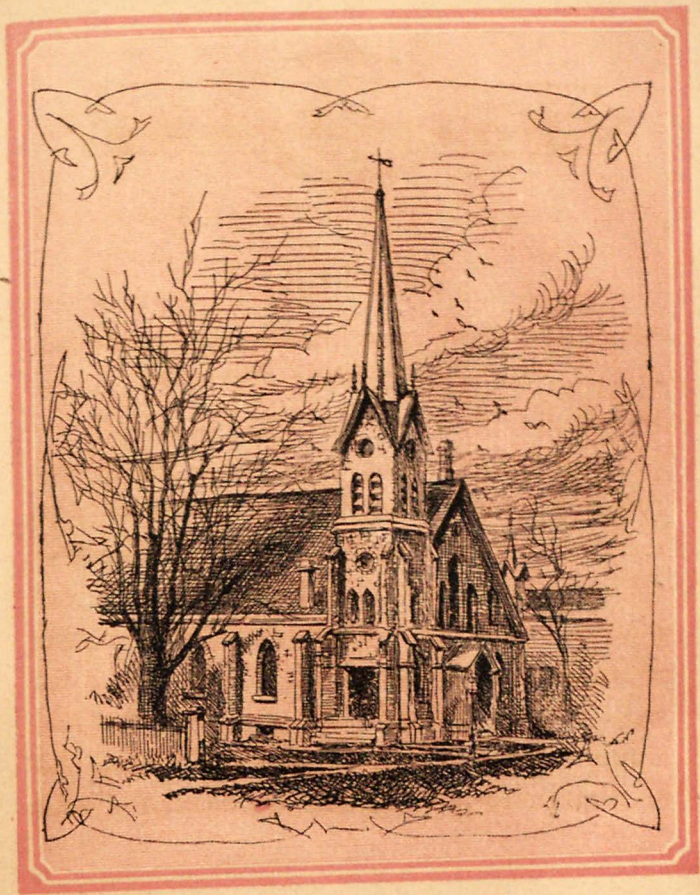


CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE CHURCH, AND THE CHILDREN WHO BOUGHT THE FONT.



MUST tell you first about the Church where the children who bought the Font went to Sunday-School. St. Luke's we call it, and it stands on the corner where two streets cross each other, in a little village which we will call Carrollton. That is not its real name, you know, but we will call it that, and then go on to tell you how the church is built



of stone, with a spire from which the paint has been worn off by time, and the rains which beat against it from the west. The window, too, on that side, has been broken by the wind, and boards are nailed across the top where the stained glass used to be. But the window will be mended in time; the old spire will be repainted; the ivy at the corner will reach higher and higher until its tendrils cling perhaps to the very roof; the fence will be built around that plat of grass, which looks so fresh this morning; and then the church will be as nice and neat as it was the day it was completed and consecrated to God. It is very pretty now inside, and the fine-toned organ in the gallery makes sweet music on a Sunday when they chant the

16 *Something about the Church.*

"Gloria in Excelsis" and sing "Peace on earth, good-will to men." That organ has played the Christmas songs which tell of a Saviour born, and the joyful Easter carols, which proclaim a Saviour risen. It has pealed a merry strain as bridal parties went up the aisle to the altar bedecked with flowers, and then its notes have been sad,— oh, so sad! — as strong men carried coffins up the aisle and laid them on the table. Two of them little coffins, with a little dead boy in each,— boys who once came to the Sunday school, but who will never come again, or join their voices in the hymns the children sing and the prayers they say.

To the left of the chancel, looking towards the organ, is a little enclosure, or room where

the singers used to sit, but which is now used for the infant class;—the nursery which feeds the larger Sunday school. It is nearly seven years since the class was first organized, and, during that time, there have been in it one hundred different children. Three of these are dead,—three little boys,—and they lie up in the quiet graveyard where the white stones show so prettily through the dark evergreens. Berkie was the first to die,—blue-eyed, pale-faced Berkie, who used to sit so quietly all through the Sunday school, with an earnest expression on his thoughtful face and in his great blue eyes, as if he were already looking away from this world into the one where he was going so soon. There is a picture on the wall before me of Berkie,

18 *Something about the Church.*

with many other members of his class, and I never look at it without a sigh, as I recall the dear little boy who used to run so gladly to meet me, and listen so attentively to the stories I told him of Jesus; and then I think of that innumerable host of white-robed children

. "whose little feet,
Pacing life's dark journey through,
Have safely reached the heavenly seat
They had ever kept in view."

And I know Berkie is there with them, and I cannot wish him back, though his going from us made a sad vacancy in our little school, and left his parents' hearts so desolate.

Children cannot be sorry long, neither is it right they should; and so the members of

Berkie's class, although they did not forget him, soon began to wear their cheerful faces again, and look forward to the Christmas festival, when the church was hung with garlands of green, and in the chancel was set up the young pine-tree, which, away in the marsh by the lake, had been growing year by year, and gathering strength in its young limbs to bear the many gifts hung upon it by parents and teachers and friends, when, on Christmas-eve, they came together to keep the birthnight of the child born in Bethlehem's manger more than eighteen hundred years ago. Children are always happy on such occasions, and it seems to me that the children of St. Luke's, in Carrollton, are particularly so, judging from the eager joy

which lights up their faces, and beams in their eyes when they hear their own names called, and go up the aisle to receive the expected gift. I wonder every church in the land does not have the Christmas-tree, and thus give to its children pleasant remembrances of that day, without which we had indeed been shrouded in the deepest gloom! True, we do not know the exact date of Christ's birth, but we know near enough, and children should be early taught that Christmas has a far deeper meaning than merely a day for festivity and mirth.

As far as possible the little ones of St. Luke's were taught to understand why the day was kept; and that rosy, round-cheeked Fred did understand was proved by his saying to his

mother, "I know what the Christmas-tree means. It is Jesus' birthday party."

Freddie had caught the spirit of the thing, if not its exact meaning; and as often as Christmas comes round he will remember the child Jesus, whose birth the church then commemorates.

The summer following Berkie's death the infant Sunday school was unusually large, and every seat was full, while a few of the smaller boys sometimes sat upon the floor. There were some visitors in Carrollton Parish that summer,—Susie Ganson from Jersey City, Maggie Holmes from New York, Lena and Ira Stevens from Philadelphia, and Sammie Field from New Orleans,—and these were all in the infant class. Then there was another

22 *Something about the Church.*

Susie and Maggie, with Louise and Maria, and Carrie, and Fanny, and Mary, and Cora, and Ida, and Dell, and Nellie, and Lizzie, and Lulu, and Jennie, and Geenie, and two Emmas. Then came the boys,—a host of them : five Willies, four Freddies, three Franks, three Georges, two Walters, two Johns, with Ezra, and Mason, and Eddie, and Charlie, and Hugh, and Hunter, and Polie, and Newton, and beautiful little Wallie,—the youngest of them all,—who presented the Easter offering last year, and whom we love so much because of his mother, who died ere he could remember more of her than the cold, white face which he patted with his dimpled hands, as he said to the weeping ones around, “That is my mamma.” Darling

Wallie! God keep him in safety, and bring him at last to the home where his mother is waiting for him!

To say that these fifty children were always quiet and well-behaved would not be true; for sometimes, when the day was warm, and they were crowded more than usual, there was a pushing among the boys, a knocking together of boots and elbows, with a few wry faces made, and a few sly pinches given. Then, too, they sometimes whispered during prayers, and compared marbles and balls, and traded jack-knives; while the girls thought sometimes of their new dresses, and the ribbons on their hats.

Do any of the children who read this story play in Sunday school, and whisper to each

24 *Something about the Church.*

other when they should be listening to what the teacher is saying? And do they know how displeasing this is to God, whose eyes are upon them everywhere, and who would have them reverence his house? I am sorry to say that there were a few children in the class who were very irregular in their attendance. The most trivial thing would keep them at home. The day was too hot or too cold,—or their new clothes were not done,—or they went out into the country to see their grandmother,—or they wandered off to some other Sunday school, where there was to be a festival or celebration, from which they hoped to be benefited. For this last the parents are especially to be censured. Better have some regular place, and stay there; for

as a rolling stone gathers no moss, so no real good can come from going to different schools, and learning sometimes from one catechism, and sometimes from another, and sometimes from none at all.

One boy there is at St. Luke's, who deserves especial notice for his regular attendance. The day is very cold and stormy indeed which does not find him there; and neither worn-out shoes nor threadbare coat avail to keep him at home. He does not always have his lesson, and he loses more catechisms than I can tell; but he is *always there*; and, what is better yet, he brings other children with him. Six, in all, has he brought to the Sunday school, and we call him our

little "recruiting officer." He has a very high-sounding name,— "Napoleon Augustus,"—but we all know him as "Polie."





CHAPTER III.

THE CHILDREN'S SEWING SOCIETY.



HERE were many baptisms last summer, and the little silver bowl was so often called into requisition, that the people began to think a marble Font would be a most appropriate and useful ornament for the church ; and who more appropriate to buy it than the children ? So the teachers set themselves at work to devise the best means by

28 *The Children's Sewing Society.*

which it could be done. And now, as it has something to do with the Font, I must tell you of the Children's Sewing Society, which met every Saturday afternoon at the different houses in the parish, and was composed of the young girls of St. Luke's, together with many who came from the other denominations. There were Carries and Lilies, and Adas, and Jennies, and Nellies and Ellas, and Marys, and Kitty, and Lenas, and Ida, and Annies, and Fannys, and many others, and they worked at first upon a patchwork quilt, intended for Nashotah. There were bits of calico of every quality and hue, from flaming yellow down to sombre brown; and the blocks were put together with but little regularity or adaptation of one color to another. But could



The Children's Sewing Society. 29

the student, whom it will keep warm next winter, have seen the group of merry-hearted girls who worked upon that quilt,—some with thimbles and some without; some with long stitches and some with short,—and could he know how engaged they were in the work, and how anxious even the youngest of them was to learn to sew for Nashotah,—he would forgive whatever there is unsightly in the quilt, and hold it more precious than the covering of kings' couches. A lady in the parish, who was deeply interested in the children's society, offered to give five dollars for the quilt when it was done, and then send it herself to Nashotah; and this five dollars was the nucleus round which other funds were to be gathered for the Font.

30 *The Children's Sewing Society.*

At last a fair was suggested, and then the little girls' fingers worked faster and their faces grew brighter as they talked together of what they could make or do for the fair. It was the one absorbing topic of conversation, and the society increased, and all were busy with something which they intended for the fair. I cannot enumerate all the articles, for it would make the story too long; and then I do not remember them. But I have in mind the beautiful bead mats, which little Susie made; and the elephant, as natural as the real ones which sometimes come into town, with their fanciful blankets on, and their big feet, which leave so large prints in the sand. There was a little air-castle, made of straw, and designed for the




flies to light on ; and every time I lift my eyes I can see it hanging over my head, and I think of the bright-eyed Carrie who made it, and who was so much interested in the fair, even though she did not belong to St. Luke's Sunday school. There were handsome hair-receivers, made by a young girl, from New York, who was spending the summer in Carrollton, and who contributed both labor and material. Boys tried their skill in making mats on corks, and harnesses for dogs ; and all through the parish the enthusiasm increased until the fair promised to be a great success.



CHAPTER IV.

WHAT WAS DONE IN THE INFANT CLASS FOR THE FAIR.

 HERE were two teachers in the infant school,—one the mother of little Berkie, and the other Mrs. Hoyt, who wrote to a friend in New York, telling him of the fair, and asking if his little daughter would like to send a few toys for the tables. Three days passed, and then the answer came, not in the shape of toys, but a crisp five-dollar bill

from little "Susie Street," another five from "little Joe," and two from "little Mamie." This was the answer; and the ladies, who had sometimes felt discouraged, and feared they might fail, believed that God was blessing them in their efforts, and with earnest prayers they gave the fair into his charge, and the result proved how faithful he was to the trust. Not satisfied with what his children had done, the kind gentleman from New York, who was an editor, interested his workmen in the matter, and the treasurer was one day surprised with twelve dollars and a half, contributed by the printers and workmen in the press-room,—strangers, the most of them, to the ladies of St. Luke's,—and the gift was all the more acceptable for that, while many

thanks and blessings were showered upon the generous donors. In Massachusetts, too, where the treasurer's childhood was passed, a few kind friends interested themselves in the Children's Fair, and eleven dollars more was the result. And so the fund kept growing, as one friendly hand after another was stretched out to help, and the Font seemed almost a certainty without the fair.

It was a plan of the teachers that the smaller children should assist, and, either by saving or earning, contribute their mites. And so each Sunday the pennies were brought, while during the week the little ones were busy as bees in devising ways and means to save or earn for the fair. I

wish you could have seen the boys who lived in the brick house just across the street from St. Luke's. They were as fond of play as boys usually are; but they gave it up for a while, and the croquet mallets rested quietly in the grass, and the old house-dog had a worried, anxious look in his eyes, as if he wondered what had come over his young masters, and why, instead of running up and down the walk with him, they stayed so long out in the back yard, or climbed the trees where he could not reach them. They were picking plums, and piling up wood, and selling grapes; and, as the result of their work, they brought to the Sunday school over a dollar and a half. And while they were thus busy, two little

girls, Susie and Maria, were picking apples, their chubby faces getting very red and their white aprons somewhat stained with the juicy fruit. Down on Main Street there was a soda-fountain, and the delicious, creamy liquid was very tempting, on a hot day, to the children who had the pennies to spare, and in many cases the temptation was too strong to be resisted; but a few denied themselves, and brought the fruits of their self-denial to their teacher, just as Willie Sutherland brought the pennies which he had saved by going without the chewing-gum which boys usually like so much. To us these self-denials may look very small, but God knew just how hard the struggle was in each little heart, and he surely

commended the offerings as he did the widow's mite, and blessed the children, too, who made them. Fourteen dollars and thirty-three cents was the sum total which the children saved in seven weeks; and never were pennies more acceptable than these, which had cost the children quite as hard a struggle as many a greater self-denial costs those of maturer years.





CHAPTER V.

THE DAY OF THE FAIR.



H, how it rained and rained for days and days before the one appointed for the fair, and how many anxious eyes were turned up towards the clouds which looked so heavy and gray and pitiless, as if they never intended to stop raining again! It was hard to believe that behind the dark mass the sun was still shining, and the children watched in vain

for the "silver lining" which is said to invest every cloud. But it appeared at last on the very day of the fair, and patches of blue sky showed here and there in the heavens, and before noon the October sun was drying the walks and the wet grass, and brightening up the little faces which for days had been overcast with gloom. The fair was to be held at a private house, and I wish you could have seen the multitude of pretty things which came pouring in, until the Brown Cottage looked like one great bazaar of toys and fancy articles. There were cushions of pink and cushions of blue, and pen-wipers and book-racks, and a beautiful whirling butterfly which Lulu bought on Broadway, and needle-books and spool-cases, and tidies of various

devices and colors, with mittens and gloves, and fanciful lines with tinkling bells attached, and I know a little boy, among the Massachusetts hills, who to-day drives his miniature horses, of which he has forty or more, with a pair of those very lines. Then there were toys of every description sent from New York by Susie Ganson's mother, and spread out upon the tables in the upper room, whose glass door looked out into the garden. There were jumping-jacks, which turned the boys wild, and churns, which made the little girls scream with delight. There were washbowls and tubs, tin-kitchens and rolling-pins, and bars to dry the dolly's clothes on, and chairs, and tables, and dishes, with balls and canes, and old Santa Claus himself bearing his

Christmas-tree with the gifts to put upon it. There was a negro, too, with his woolly head and calico frock, looking so life-like and real that some of the smaller children drew back from him in terror, fancying he was alive.

Downstairs, in the bay window, and on a table where it could be distinctly seen, was the "Beauty of the Fair,"—a little stained bedstead, which an ingenious gentleman had whittled out with his penknife. It was a most perfect thing, with castors, and mattress tufted with pink, with ruffled sheets and pillow-cases, the ruffles all nicely fluted and showing well against the covering of white Marseilles. Upon it lay a handsome doll, in her muslin dress and scarlet cloak, ready

for the opera. The two were to go together, and many a little girl hoped she might be made the happy possessor of so beautiful a gift. In a corner of the parlor, the books which a kind New York publisher had given, were arranged, together with the Fate Eggs, which looked so pretty suspended from the branch of evergreen made to resemble a tree. The books and the eggs were to be Jennie's charge, — dear little Jennie, with the pale, sweet face, whom everybody loves and pities so much, — for Jennie is lame; and when the other children of her age are at their merry play, she can only lean upon her crutches and watch the sports in which she can take no part. Near Jennie's corner the candy and flower tables stood, and Annie

FLOWER STAND



and Carrie were to preside there, and send out little peddlers with baskets of candy and bouquets to sell.

I must not forget to tell you of the famous fish pond, as it was something new in Carrollton, and proved a great success. A corner of the room was divided off with a heavy curtain, on which the printed words,

FISH POND

were pinned, while standing near were fishing rods and lines, with hooks made out of wire. With these the children were to fish, throwing the lines over the curtain, where was a box filled with toys of various kinds, and a boy who fastened the *bites* upon the hooks as fast as they came over.

At last everything was ready. The drapery had been taken from the windows and the pictures from the walls; the furniture had been removed from the rooms, which looked bare and empty enough, I assure you. There were curtains before the doors of the library where the tableaux were to be, and on the piano stood the big *shoe* where Louise was to sit and sell her three dozen dolls. There were loaves and loaves of cake in the kitchen, which served as the restaurant, and gallons of ice-cream in the freezers. And all over the town the excited children were getting ready, and watching for the sun to set and the clock to point the hour when it was time for them to start.



CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT OF THE FAIR.



T seemed a very inhospitable thing to close the doors of one's house, and let in only those who paid for the admittance; but it had been decided that such should be the rule, and so at precisely six o'clock every door was locked, and the boys who were to tend them waited with an air of great importance for the ring which was to herald the first

arrival, and put the first dime in their box. They had not long to wait, for the children were prompt to time, and came in groups of half-dozens, and dozens, and scores, until the boys who kept the doors became confused and bewildered, and gladly gave up their post to some one who was older, and could better stem the tide of human beings pouring in so fast, and filling the lower rooms till there was hardly a place to stand. It was a great jam,—the greatest which had ever been in town. Four hundred people were present, and, in an inconceivably short space of time, the tables upstairs were cleared, and then the crowd came surging down to the parlors, and gathered round the candy-table, which was emptied in a few moments,—for the



little peddlers, Lily and Kitty and Jennie and Lena and Ada and Emma and Nellie, did their part well, and no one could refuse to buy when asked by so beautiful little girls. There were cabinet pictures, too, contributed by one of our finest artists, and these sold rapidly, until only two were left,—one of Horace Greeley, and another of some scene in Germany.

Then came the tableaux. The first, called the "Red, White, and Blue," was a group of three little girls,—Lizzie, Susie, and Lulu,—each wearing a white dress, and a sash of the color she represented, ornamented with stars. Around them were gathered the children,—three of whom sang the popular air, "Red, White, and Blue," while all joined in the

chorus,—the boys' voices rising loud and shrill with their "Three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue!"

I wish you could have seen the next tableau, called the "Bridal of Tom Thumb," where Maria, in her long tarletan dress and flowing veil, with the orange blossoms in her hair, stood for Lavinia Warren; and little Maggie Holmes, only three years old, represented Minnie,—her soft, blue eyes looking shyly out from under their long lashes at the people, who set up loud shouts of laughter at the sight of the comical-looking party. There was Wallie, as Tom Thumb, in his swallow-tailed coat, with his white vest and wide cravat, just putting the ring on Maria's finger; while beside him was little Josey



Allen, similarly attired, and making the drollest figure you ever saw, as, with his thumb in his white vest, he stood erect and still,—making a better Commodore than the Commodore himself,—while Willie Campbell, in surplice made of a sheet, was supposed to perform the ceremony. As you may imagine, Maria and Maggie, Wallie and Josey, were the stars of the evening; but the poor little girls, in their long, trailing dresses, were almost as helpless as the ladies of China are with their little feet; and they had to be carried around in gentlemen's arms, and shown to the people who had been unable to see them distinctly.

“Santa Claus” came next; and Mason, with his white hair, and beard, and furs,

made a capital St. Nick, and elicited peals of laughter as he drove in his eight reindeer, each with pasteboard horns tied on his head, and his name pinned on his back in large capitals. There were DASHER and DANCER, and PRANCER and VIXEN. There were COMET and CUPID, and DUNDER and BLITZEN; and the little bells about their necks made a soft, tinkling sound, as they shook their horned heads, and pranced in imitation of deer, while waiting for their master to fill the sleeping children's stockings with toys. Then, with a bound, St. Nick sprang into his sleigh, and the little cortege passed on through the parlor and hall and sitting-room and dining-room, and so out of sight.

There was a post-office, too, and the mail



was drawn by eight little boys, with red plumes on their heads, and driven again by Mason, who showed great skill in the management of his horses and reindeer. Close beside the boys ran little Sammie Field, with the words, "THIS-IS-A-COLT," pinned on his back; and I assure you that kicking colt attracted quite as much attention as the eight plumed horses did. The letters, which sold for five and ten cents each, made a great deal of fun, and added to the general hilarity of the evening.

You should have seen Ella, dressed as an old woman, and trying to thread the point of her needle by a tallow candle of enormous length, and which was called "The Light of other Days." Louise, too, in broad-

frilled cap and glasses, with her dollies all over her, represented the "Old Woman in the Shoe," and attracted crowds around her, until every doll was sold, and the great shoe was nearly empty. The Fish Pond was very popular, and was drained in half an hour,—the boys and girls going nearly crazy over it, and contending with each other for a chance to fish, at five cents a bite. It proved a great success, as did everything pertaining to the fair, which closed with "JOHNNY SCHMOKER," sung and acted by the children, and a tableau arranged by the young ladies.

It was rather late when at last the fair was over, and the children went home very tired, and a few of them a little cross, it may be, though some were very happy, as was proved



by little black-eyed Johnny, who had come up from Rochester, and who, after the fair was over, and he was going to bed, asked his mother if she did not think that children were sometimes as happy in this world as they would ever be in heaven; "Because, mother," said he, "I know I was as happy to-night at the fair as I shall ever be in heaven."

When the ladies, who had worked so hard and been sometimes so disheartened, heard of that, they felt that the fair had paid, if only in making one child so happy. That it paid, too, in a more tangible form, was shown when the receipts were footed up, and found to amount to over two hundred and sixty dollars. You may be sure there

was great rejoicing the next day when it was known that we had enough to get the Font, together with the bishop's and rector's chairs, which we so much needed. Means were immediately taken to have them in readiness by Christmas, so that the children could then present them to the church.







CHAPTER VII.

POOR LITTLE HUNTER.

THE fair was held on the third of October, and of all the boys there, none was happier, or enjoyed it more, than little Hunter Buckley, who never dreamed that this was the last festivity in which he would ever join with his comrades,—that before the winter snows were falling, or the Font or which he had worked was set up in the

church, he would be buried away from sight and sound,—where the songs of the children could not reach him, nor the moans of his poor mother, who mourned so bitterly for her little darling boy. His death was very sudden. In the morning he was perfectly well, and his mother little thought when, after breakfast, he bade her good-by, and started for the village, that never again would his feet come down the grassy lane, or his loved voice sound in her ears; that when he came back to her it would be as the dead come back,—lifeless and still. Yet so it was; for in a few hours the news ran through the village that Hunter Buckley was dead,—smothered in the wheat where he was playing; and which was running through a

large tunnel into a boat loading at the wharf. It was a careless thing to play there; but he had done it before, and thought of no danger now, until the suction became so great that it was impossible to escape, and he was drawn into that whirlpool of grain.

I saw him the next day, looking, except that he was paler, exactly as he had the Sunday before, when he sat in Sunday school, and listened to the lessons his teacher taught.

The next day was his funeral; and six young boys carried his coffin up the aisle and laid it on the table; while, in silence and awe, his companions listened to the words the clergyman spoke,—words of admonition to them,—words of commendation of the dead,—and words of comfort for the

weeping friends, over whom so heavy a sorrow was brooding. They were sad notes which the organ played then, and more than one voice trembled as it joined in the hymn sung over the dead boy, and then they carried him out to the long, black hearse, which bore him to the graveyard where Berkie had gone before him.

Since that time they have dug another grave, and the boys of the Sunday school have followed Walter Hewitt there. He died when the winter snows were heaped upon the ground, and now lies in the same yard where Hunter and Berkie are,—three little boys, who will sleep there in their coffins until the resurrection morn, when Jesus comes to claim his own and take them to himself.



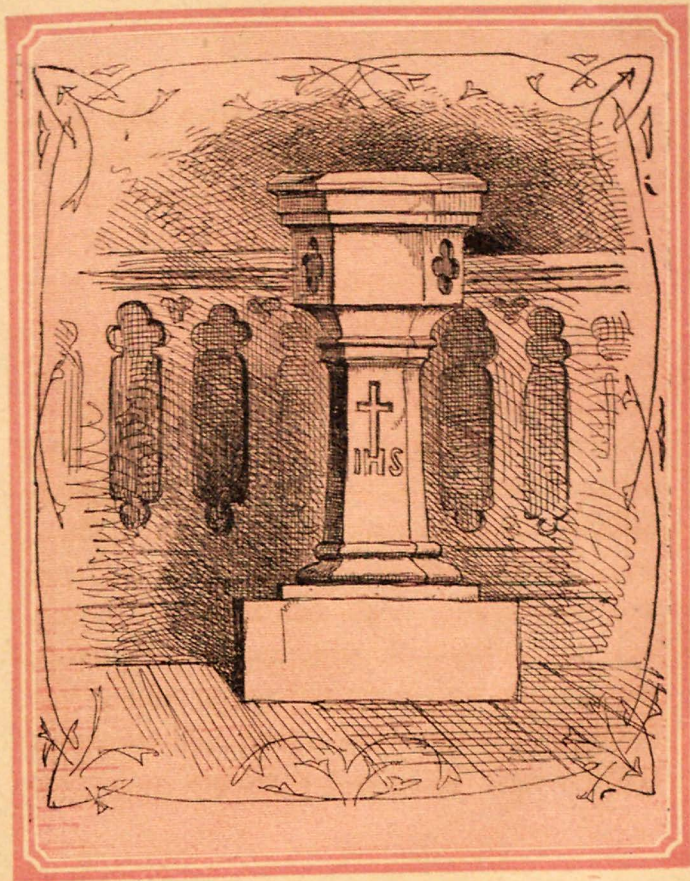
CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS, 1867.



HERE was no rector in the parish that winter; but the people kept up lay-services and the Sunday school, and were resolved that the children should not go without the usual festival. So the evergreens were brought from the lake, and a beautiful pine-tree, and a few of the ladies worked industriously, day after day, fashioning wreaths and crosses and

anchors, which were hung upon the walls and festooned about the chancel, where the tree was placed, its long branches reaching out in every direction, as if asking for the many hundred gifts which came pouring in so fast. There were dolls and tops, and bows and arrows, and Christmas cakes all sugared over the top, and stamped with the owner's name. There were books and cards, and marbles and balls, and a beautiful slipper-case, which Lulu gave to her teacher. There were boxes with candy and boxes without, and horses and cows, and monkeys in red, and tea-kettles and pails, and golden fishes, which gleamed so brightly from among the dark-green leaves of the tree. There was a white ermine muff, and a picture called the



“Christmas Bell,” bought for Berkie’s mother by her class; while, swinging in his pretty cage, there was a beautiful Canary, who, when the gas was lighted and he had recovered a little from his fright at being brought from the depot with a shawl over his cage, began to look about him, and wink his bright eyes at the children. Then, as he began to feel more at home and to get an inkling of what it all meant, he opened his mouth and poured forth one sweet song after another until it seemed as if his little throat would burst.

But the handsomest gift of all was the FONT, which had come the night before and been firmly fixed in its place just outside the chancel. It was of Italian marble, very graceful in its proportions, and on the top, in

black letters, were the words, "Presented by the children of St. Luke's Sunday School, Christmas, 1867," followed by "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." This was, of course, the centre of attraction, and both the children and the grown people gathered around it, commenting on its beauty, and wondering who would be the first child baptized from it. The new chairs, too, were there, made of solid oak, and upholstered with crimson, so that the church looked very handsome with its new furniture, and the Christmas-tree, with the tapers shining from its branches and lighting up the hundreds of pretty things upon it.

I have told you before that we had no clergyman; but our good doctor read a part of

the evening service, and then made a few remarks to the children, who, I am afraid, did not listen very closely, they were so intent upon the tree and what they would probably get from it. Our organist had taken great pains to drill the children in their carols, and when they sang of "The Wonderful Night," we could almost see the

"Angels and shining immortals
Which, crowding the ebony portals,
Fling out their banners of light."

It is a splendid carol, and if you do not already know it, I advise you to get the "New Service Book" and learn it before another Christmas-eve.

The distribution of gifts commenced at last,

and never were children happier than those who, as their names were called, went up one after another to the chancel, and came back with loaded hands, and hearts throbbing with a keener, purer delight than they will ever know after the years of childhood are past, and they have grown to be women and men. The tree was stripped at last, and all over the church there was the hum of eager, excited voices, mingled occasionally with a blast from a whistle or horn blown by some boy who could not wait till he reached home before testing his musical instrument. Then there came a hush, as the closing prayer was said, and the grand old chant was sung, "Glory to God on high." How the music rolled through the church as the organ pealed its loudest

strains, and the boys and girls joined in the song, while the little bird, frantic by this time with all it had seen and heard, fairly shook its golden sides as it trilled its clear, shrill notes, and mingled its own loud voice in the last Christmas song!

Half an hour later, and the church was silent and empty, the organ was hushed, the echo of the singing had died away, the tree was shorn of its decorations, the children were all at home, sleeping many of them and dreaming, perhaps, of that boy-baby whose birth the angels sang, whom wise men came to worship, and over whose cradle hovered the shadow of the cross. But with the early dawn I know they will awake, looking at

their treasures and living over again the joy of the preceding night.

Blessed childhood, when guarded and hedged around with the influences which religion brings! Which of us does not recall with a pang of regret those halcyon days when the summer was so long and bright because of the flowers and birds, and the autumn so fair and sweet because of the ripening fruits and nuts, and the winter so glorious because of the beautiful snow? And who does not love the children and wish to make them happy? I most certainly do; and as, while writing this story of *The Font*, the actors in the fair have one by one passed in review before me, I have kissed and blessed them all, and asked

that God would keep them to a green old age, when, perhaps, they may read, with strange, curious feelings, what I have written of them.

And to the children I have never seen, but who may read this story, I would say, I love you, too;—love you because you are children and parts of God's great family, and I pray him that you may one day meet in the better world with every one of those who helped to buy the Font, and her who wrote its story.

THE END.