

He stood still and listened as though to recover his sense of direction.

Silence! And the snow falling faster and thicker.

Silence! Mother and children waiting in the bright cottage.

Silence! Cold and darkness!

In all his outdoor life, John had never known the meaning of fear or nerves, but they were making themselves felt now.

Silence! The snow, falling, falling.

Then suddenly the stillness was broken, and from out of old Bob's hut there came the lusty cry of a babe. The shepherd listened. "'Twas my fancy," he thought. But once more the plaintive appeal smote his ear. Ploughing his way to the hut, he opened the door and shed the light of his lantern on the interior.

There in the far corner was a bundle from which the cries proceeded.

To his bewildered senses, there shone over it a radiance outdoing the light of his lantern. It came from a shadowy figure, gracious and tender, clad in misty blue, which knelt with outstretched protective arms over the bundle.

Something urged him to uncover his head and kneel too, on the spot where he had entered. When he lifted his head, the light had faded and he was alone.

With shaking, clumsy hands he drew aside the covering in the corner and discovered a tiny babe. It had evidently been there but a short time, for the bottle of milk at its neck was still warm, but the teat had fallen from the little groping mouth. Pinned to the shawl was a paper on which John deciphered with difficulty:

"Holy Mary! gentle Mother! On your Baby's birthday take my little one to your care. Don't let him suffer long and pray God to forgive his unhappy mother."

John Durtnall scratched his head. "She was demented, sure, poor girl. Seems as though she was answered, anyway. Well I can do no other than take it along 'ome to mother; that's to say," he thought with an uneasy laugh, "if I can manage to get there." He went outside and threw the rays of his lantern right and left. "There a'int no sign of the poor creature as far as I can see, which ain't far."

He called loudly: "Hie, missie! You can come along 'ome along o' me. Don't be afeard, my dear. I be shepherd Durtnall, and my missus 'll be good to yer."

But there came no answer out of the darkness.

"'Taint no manner of use," he thought.

Once more he set out, ploughing along, the babe warm in his bosom inside his rough coat. Its cries ceased with the milk John had given it. "'Taint the first time," he thought with a sudden catch of his breath as he thought of the wooden cradle by the fire.

His imagination began to work—"Like one o' them shepherds. Let's go to Bethlem. Wish I could see the star though. Seems as I heard music then. 'Glory to God.'"

There was consternation in the shepherd's cottage next morning, for father had not returned.

A search party set out at daybreak. John's old dog traced his master lying unconscious in the snow, with the babe wrapped warmly in his breast. It was a sad Christmas day in the cottage. John's delirium had but one theme, the words of the anthem he had been practising with the village choir. "There were shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night!"

"Same as father," said young Jack thoughtfully.

"An' he found little Jesus an' all."

"Ain't we goin' to 'ave no Chrismis, mother?" asked little Meg, as she stood with a finger in her wistful mouth.

"Yes, my bairn. Doctor ses as father'll be on the mend

by to-morrer, and we'll keep it then. Be a good maid and 'twill soon come."

"An' an' we can put a wee stockin' for the new liddle baby?"

"Aye that we will, child; and put in a pair of the woolly booties gran sent for our baby."

"What'll us call 'un? Could us call 'un 'Jesus'?"

"No, no; there's only One as can 'ave that Name. Shall us call 'un Chris'? Sounds like Chrismis."

Parson, who was never far away when his folk needed him, looked down at the honest face—transfigured somehow—he had known man and boy all his life.

"I wonder," he mused, with a touch of envy, "what John saw out in the snow last night. Things hidden from the wise and prudent perhaps."

H. H.

A LITTLE SANCTUARY.

We are entirely in sympathy with Mrs. Baldwin's "little sanctuary." She said at a recent meeting of the Women's Section of the London Municipal Society:—

"In all slum clearance schemes I feel it is important that in the rebuilt areas there should be provided a little sanctuary for the dead. So often in the present overcrowded areas, when someone dies, there is no place for the body to be laid until the funeral except under the table or under the bed. I heard of one case recently in which a little child died, and the only place the mother had in which to lay the body was in the scullery. In my opinion, this is not sanitary, it is not reverent, and it is not even human. All we want is a small sanctuary with colour-washed walls and undenominational.

"I wrote a letter to the L.C.C. urging this need, and the letter was received most sympathetically. They said that such a sanctuary was being provided in their new areas. The only trouble is they insist on calling this little place a 'morgue,' but I think the word 'sanctuary' would be much better."

VERSES.

"'33 and '34."

Old Father Time, who never wastes a minute,
And active night and day
(Too busy to see any grievance in it),
Leads '33 away!

We who remain would civilly remind them
Before they close the door,
To leave a less exacting orb behind them
O'er little '34!

Critics agree that Phœbus would do better
To temper blaze that kills
And see that things were sometimes rather wetter
"Upon a thousand hills."

C. B. M.

COMING EVENTS.

1933.

December 15th.—General Nursing Council for England and Wales. Council Meeting, 20, Portland Place, London, W.1. 2.30 p.m.

December 16th.—The British College of Nurses. Council Meeting, 2.15 p.m. Celebration of Registration Day. Address on "The Story of the Royal Hospital and Collegiate Church of St. Katherine," followed by a résumé of the Discussion on Compulsory State Registration of Nurses at the International Congress of Nurses, 1933, by Miss Isabel Macdonald, followed by the ceremony of cutting the Registration Cake. Meeting 4.30 p.m. Tea 5 p.m.

December 25th.—Christmas Day. Hospital Festivities.

1934.

January 1st.—New Year's Day.

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