THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

By Frederic E. Weatherly.

ILLUSTRATED BY

M. Ellen Edwards & John C. Staples.

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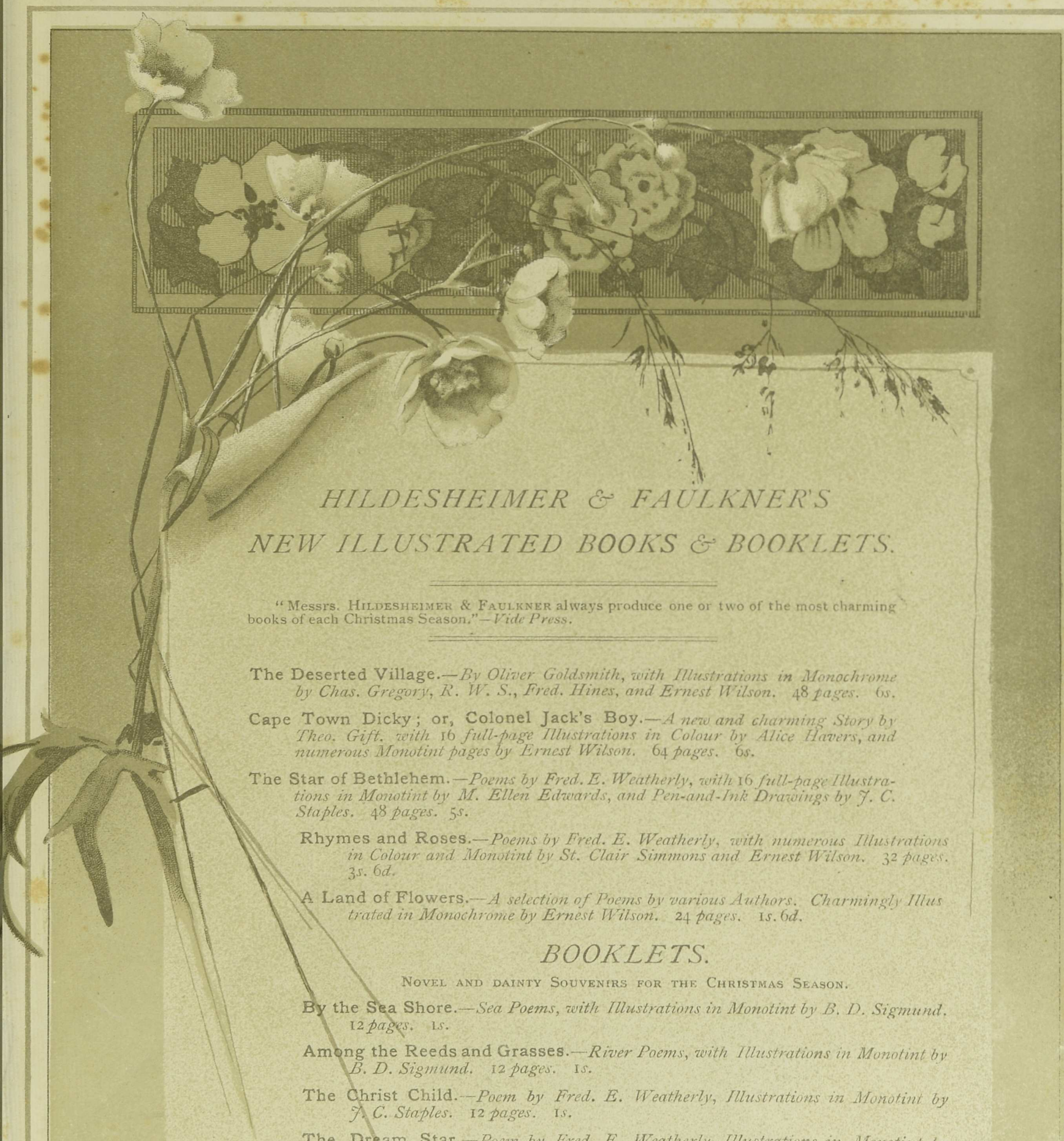

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Dedication.

Take, little mother, for my sake,
The poor and halting rhymes I make,
For all your love, for all your care
That made my childhood-days so fair.

And, as you read the trembling rhymes
And turn to those remembered times,
You'll hear my voice, perchance, and see
Your little boy upon your knee.

Then take them, mother, to your breast,
To you I give my first and best,
For all that's good and pure and true,
I learnt from you, I learnt from you.

2.

The Star of Bethlehem

By

Frederic E. Weatherly.

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Vignettes by

John C. Staples.

LONDON.
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NEW YORK.
Geo. C. Whitney.

The Star of Bethlehem.

It was the eve of Christmas, the snow lay deep and white,
I sat beside my window and looked into the night;
I heard the church-bells ringing, I saw the bright stars shine,
And childhood came again to me with all its dreams divine.

Then, as I listened to the bells, and watched the skies afar,
Out of the East majestical there rose one radiant star,
And every other star grew pale before that heavenly glow,
It seemed to bid me follow and I could not choose but go.

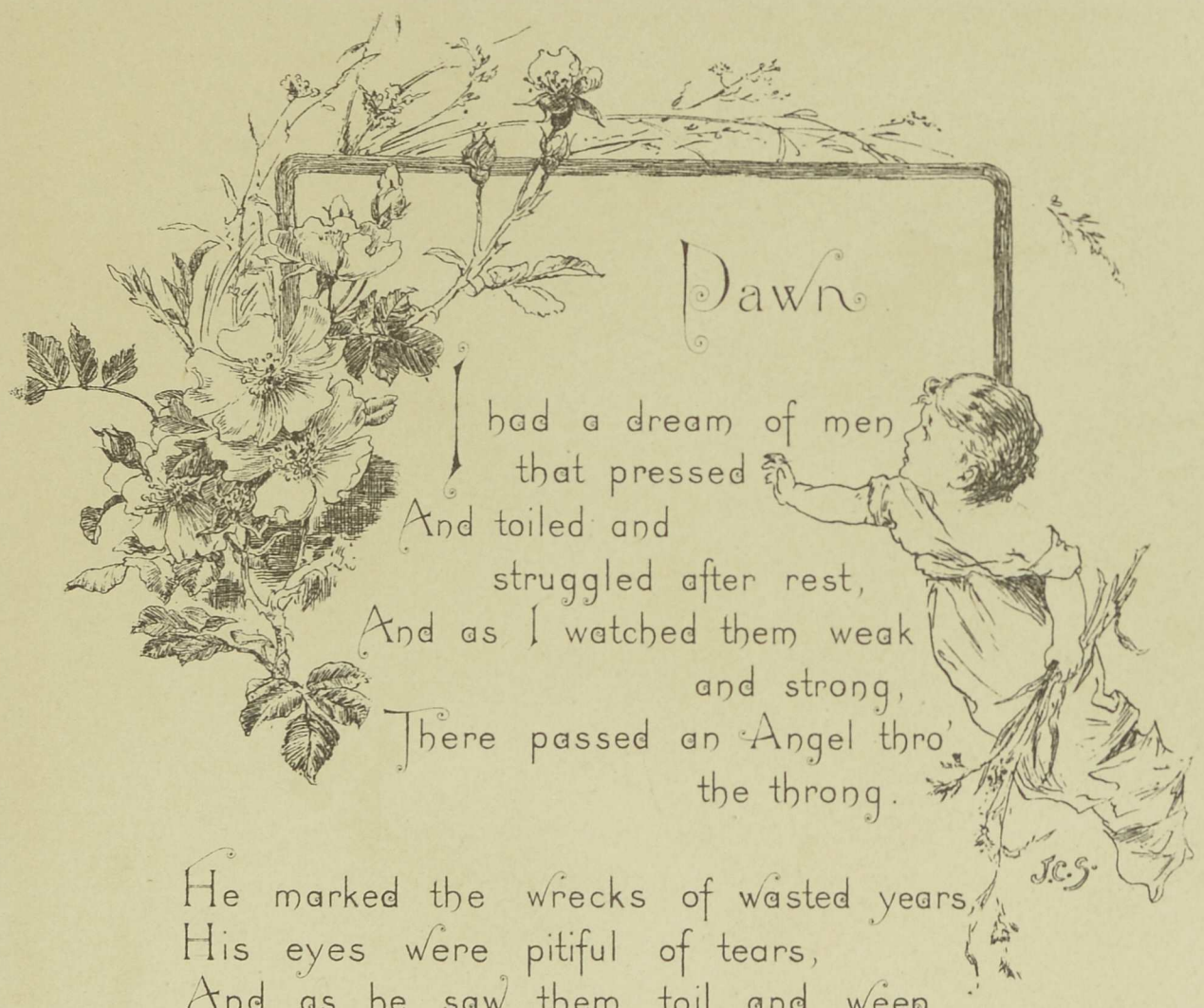
From street to street it led me, by many a mansion fair,
It shone thro' dingy casements on many a garret bare,
From highway on to highway, thro' alley dark and cold,
And where it shone the darkness was flooded all with gold.

Sad hearts forgot their sorrow, rough hearts grew soft and mild,
And weary little children turned in their sleep and smiled:
And many a homeless wanderer uplifted patient eyes,
Seeming to see a home at last beyond those starry skies.

5.

And then methought earth faded; I rose, as borne on wings,
Beyond the waste of ruined lives, the press of human things,
Beyond the toil and shadow, above the want and woe,
My old self and its darkness seemed left on earth below.

And upward, onward shone the star, until it seemed to me
It flashed upon the golden gates and o'er the crystal sea;
And then the gates rolled backward, I stood where angels trod—
It was the Star of Bethlehem had led me up to God.



Dawn

I had a dream of men
that pressed
And toiled and
struggled after rest,
And as I watched them weak
and strong,
There passed an Angel thro'
the throng.

He marked the wrecks of wasted years,
His eyes were pitiful of tears,
And as he saw them toil and weep,
He touched their hearts and whispered "Sleep."

I watched the night pass on and go,
Far off I heard a trumpet blow,
And swift across the sea there came
An Angel with a face of flame.

He shouted o'er the world afar,
"Unbar thy gates, O Sleep, unbar!"
And then I knew the dawn was nigh.
The golden dawn that shall not die!

8.

A little Child's Christmas Prayer.

Little star above my head,
Shining down upon my bed,
Lighting up the gathering gloom
All about my little room,—

Are you that same star which shone
To the Wise men years agone,
Leading them where Christ was born,
E'en as on to-morrow morn.

Rough their way was, dark and far,
But they saw you, little star,
Ever onward lighting them,
Lighting them to Bethlehem!

So be near me every night,
Light me with your heavenly light;
Bless me with your tender ray,
When I sleep and when I pray!

The Carol Singers.

Three little carol singers
Out in a snowy street;
Ah for their wan little faces,
Ah for their weary feet!
But a light in their eyes is shining,
Happy the song they sing:—
"Oh Christ was born in Bethlehem,
To be the children's King."

Three little carol singers
Roaming their lonely way,
Nobody cares to listen,
No one has time to stay.
Three little pilgrims sleeping
Under the night's black wing,
Dreaming of Heaven and the angels,
And Christ, the children's King.

MEE

Three little carol singers
Out in the morning street;
Cold are their little faces,
Still are their weary feet.
Three little happy angels
Up thro' the clouds they wing,
Gone to the far blue Heavens
To see the children's King!

Yuletide.

When at Yuletide, praying lowly,
Cometh to thy prayer
Something noble, pure and holy,
Power to do and dare:
When thou wakest after sleeping,
Strengthened, glad, and blest,
Know the Christ-Child has been keeping
Gentle watch about thy sleeping,
Blessing all thy rest!

The Absent One.

There is summer where I'm sitting,
A summer deep and wide:
But O to be in England
At the happy Christmastide;
While they gather in the firelight,
And outside, the children sing
The old, old Christmas carols
Of Christ, the children's King.

Do you think of me, I wonder,
As you see my empty chair?
Do you wonder what I'm doing,
Do you wish that I were there?
O I see your gentle faces,
And your dear dear hands I hold,
And I know your hearts are near me,
And you love me as of old.

And the self-same words we whisper,
And the same old prayer we pray,
You — at home in happy England,
And I — so far away.
Though on earth we meet no longer,
Though the seas between us roll,
The peace of holy Christmas
Shall join us — soul to soul.

The New Christmas.

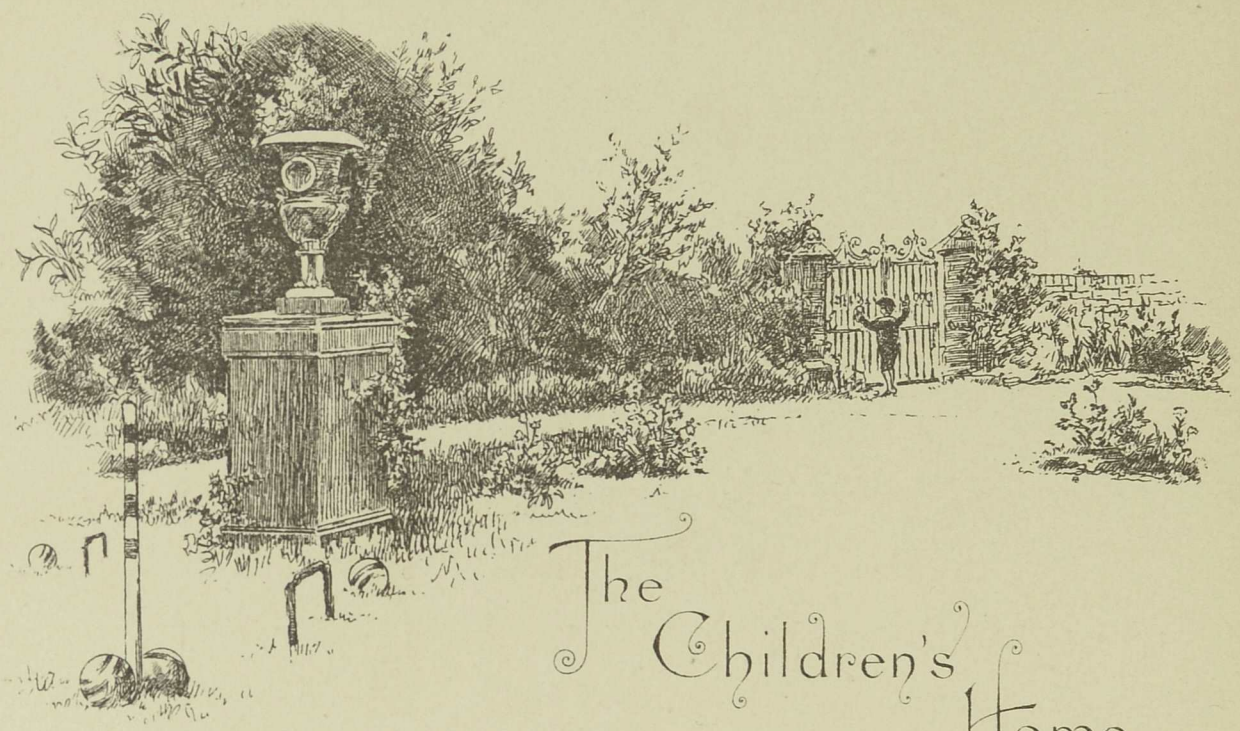
Tenderly, lovingly, out of the night,
Cometh a maiden clad in white,
Bright holly berries her tresses between,
And a girdle round her of ivy green.

Old Father Christmas, that coarse old soul,
With gait uncertain, and brimming bowl,
Over the seas far off hath fled,
And left us the New Maiden Christmas instead.

Tenderly, lovingly, cometh she
In her snow-white robe of purity,
With holly for smiles our days to bless,
And true green ivy for faithfulness.

O sweet New Christmas, stay with us, stay,
And bless us for this and every day,
That so our lives may clothed be
In faithfulness, smiles, and purity!

17.



The Children's Home.

They played in their beautiful gardens,
The children of high degree:
Outside the gates the beggars
Passed on in their misery:

But there was one of the children
Who could not join the play,
And a little beggar maiden
Watched for him day by day.

Once he had given her a flower:
And oh! how he smiled to see
Her thin white hands thro' the railings
Stretched out so eagerly!

She came again to the garden,
    She saw the children play,
But the little white face had vanished,
    The little feet gone away.

She crept away to her corner,
    Down by the murky stream;
But the pale, pale face in the garden
    Shone through her restless dream.

And that high-born child and the beggar
    Passed homeward side by side:
For the ways of men are narrow,
    But the gates of Heav'n are wide.

MEE

Elsie's Doll.

Along the blowing winter streets,
all snugly wrapt and warm,
Went little Lady Elsie, her dolly on her arm;
While ragged little Molly, with neither shoes nor hat,
Stood staring, wondering what 'twould feel if she
were drest like that.

If only she could have a doll, how glad
she'd be and grand,
And then she looked so wistfully,
and stretched a pleading hand,
And Elsie, as she saw her, stopped;
then, with one little sigh,
She put her doll in Molly's arms, and hurried quickly by.

That night the gold-haired dolly lay in a garret-bed,
With Molly's thin arms round her, by Molly's ragged head,
While Molly in a land of dreams was singing at her play,
For there were no hard bitter streets,
no starving day by day.

And Elsie in her dainty bed is also dreaming sweet
That all the dolls of nursery-land are coming to her feet;
And with a new-found happiness she
wakes with morning-light,
For Molly's grateful spirit
had been blessing her all night.

Santa Claus.

"What will Santa Claus bring us?"
The wondering children say,
Sitting awake in the moonlight,
Talking of Christmas Day.

"What will the old man bring us?
Something so sweet and grand,
If we lay our heads on the pillow,
And go to slumberland.

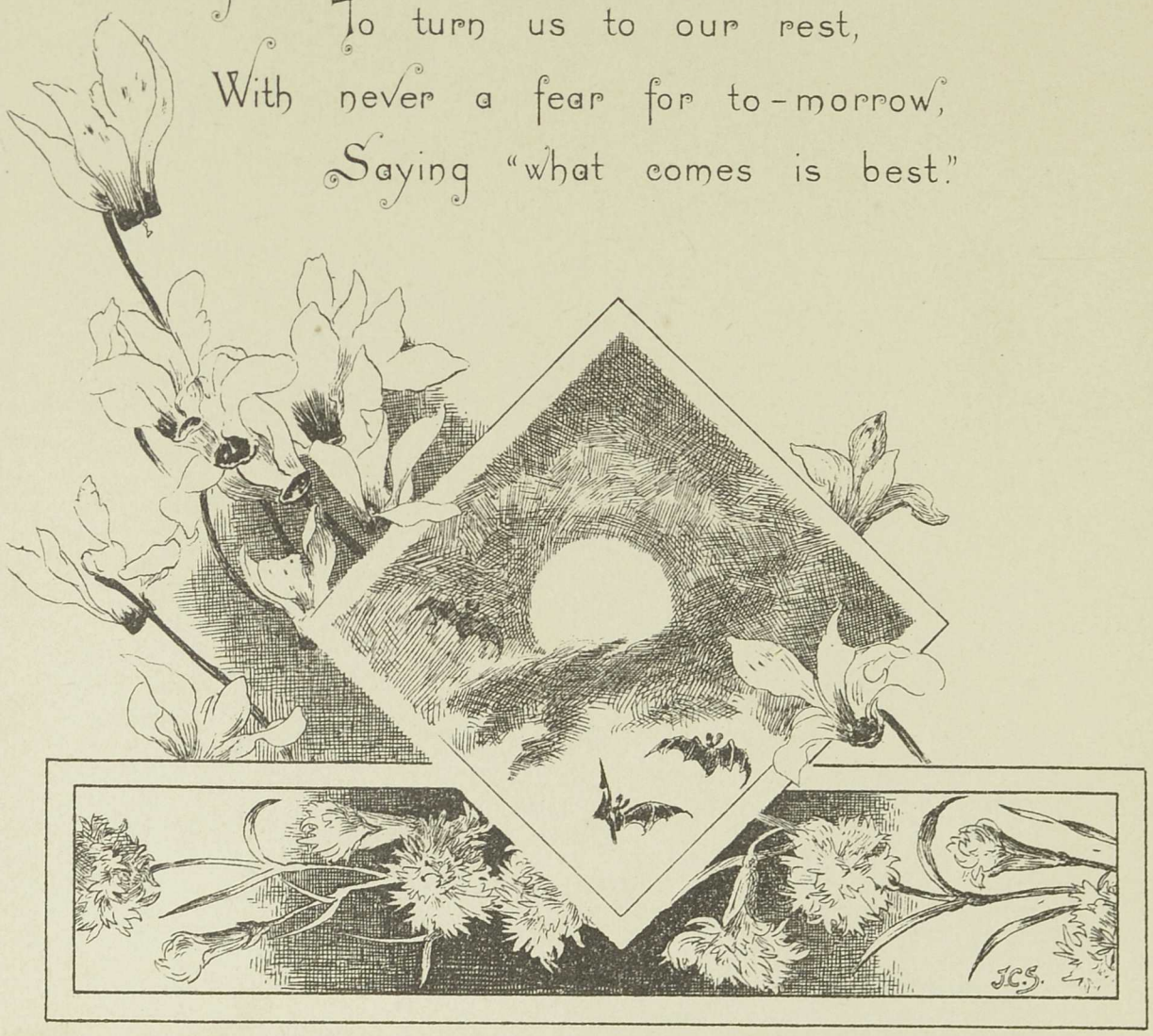
"Is he waiting up in the chimney
Or creeping about the house,
Waiting till we are fast asleep,
The dear old Santa Claus?"

Then they turn in faith undoubting,
Under the clothes they creep,
And away they go to dreamland,
To the beautiful land of sleep.

23.

Sleep on, O happy children,
We are children just like you,
"What will to-morrow bring us?"
We wonder and question too.

But ah for your faith and gladness
To turn us to our rest,
With never a fear for to-morrow,
Saying "what comes is best."



Do you remember the time gone by,
When we were children, you and I,
When the day grew dark and the lights were lit,
And all together we loved to sit;
When mother read to us, soft and low,
Tales of the brave days long ago,
And we sat and listened and held her hand,
As she led us away to story-land.

MEE

Do you remember the words she said
Every night as we stole to bed;
All that she taught us to try to do,
To be good and gentle, pure and true?
Do you remember her soft "good night,"
As she kissed our eyes in the shaded light;
And the last sweet touch of her tender hand,
As we drifted away to slumber-land?

All is altered; the years flow on,
Little mother is dead and gone,
We wander about the old old place,
And long for the sight of her loving face.
Mother, speak from the distant shore,
Speak to thy children, speak once more;
Call to us, comfort us, stretch thy hand,
And fetch us home to the spirit-land.

The Christ-Child.

At Yuletide, as the story tells,
There comes a gentle Angel-child,
From far-off lands, where no man dwells,
Across the northern waters wild.

And passing down the sleeping street,
It cleaves the night with noiseless tread:
White raiment to the bare white feet,
Gold halo round the golden head.

It bends above the sleeping heads,
Of peer and peasant, slaves and kings;
Sweet thoughts, and sinless slumber sheds,
And happy dreams of heavenly things.

O, never, with its angel face,
May that sweet comer pass us by!
O Christ-child, look on us in grace,
And bless us where we sleeping lie!

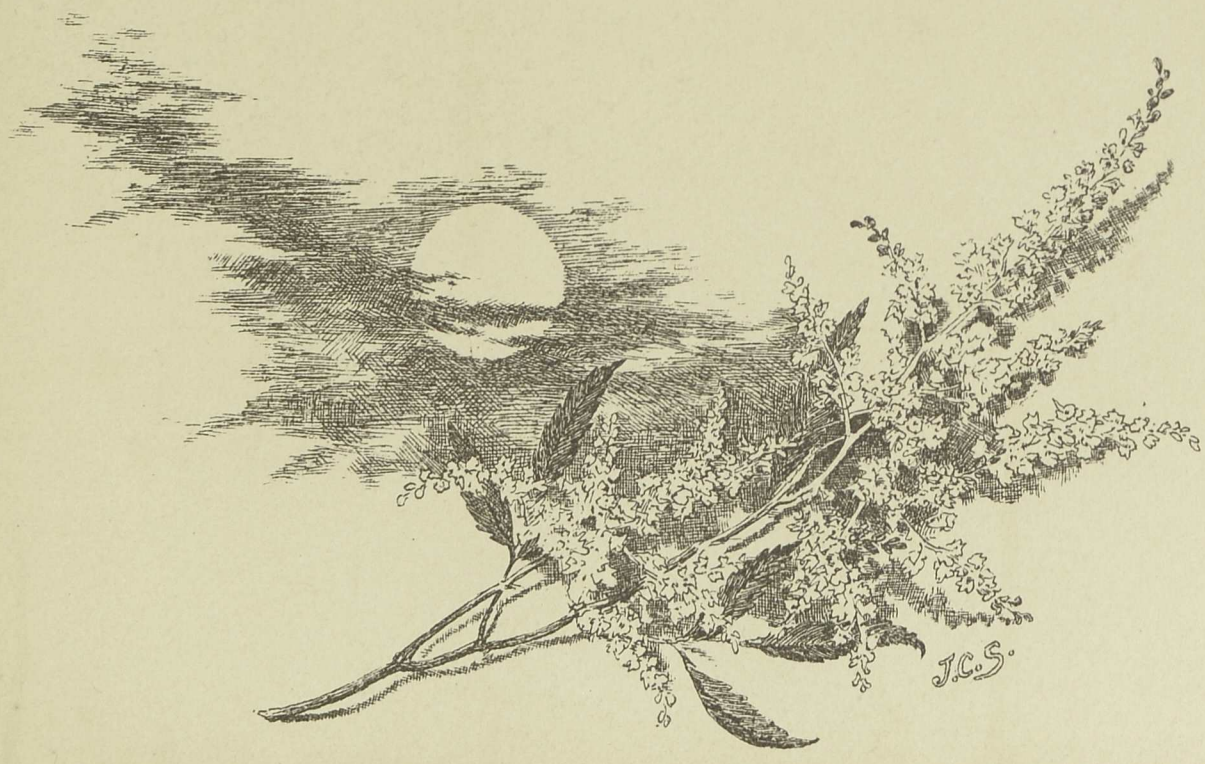
29.

Saviour of the little children
Thou didst once rebuke and chide
Those hard hearts who would have kept them,
Kept the children from thy side.
In thine arms with love and mercy
Thou didst take them unto thee,
Saying "They are of the Kingdom,
Suffer them to come to me."

So rebuke all cares that clamour,
Set all worldly thoughts apart,
Hush the cries that fain would silence
Purer wishes in each heart.
So accept our prayers in mercy,
Weak and childlike though they be,
Take them to thy heart, O take them,
Suffer them to come to thee.

Angel Land.

I dreamt I was a child last night,
Beside the happy western sea,
And all my little playmates bright
Came back once more and played with me.
We sat and whispered hand in hand,
I hear our very words to-day:
"O where, O where is Angel-land,
And shall we ever find the way?"



My dream was changed: fast fell the night,
Alone I knelt beside the sea,
For upward through the starry light
My playmates flew away from me.
They rose, they rose,—a shining band,
I called them, but they might not stay,
Away! Away! to Angel-land
My little playmates flew away.

O happy days! O playmates sweet!
O hearts of childhood long ago,
I wonder where we all shall meet,
And what the joy we then shall know.
O hear me, hear me, Angel-band,
O lift me from this gloomy shore,
And take me home to Angel-land
To be a child with you once more.

The Bells' Blessing.

Open your windows: the bells are ringing,
Hark! how they peal on the wintry wind!
Hark to the song the bells are singing:—
"Peace and goodwill to all mankind!"

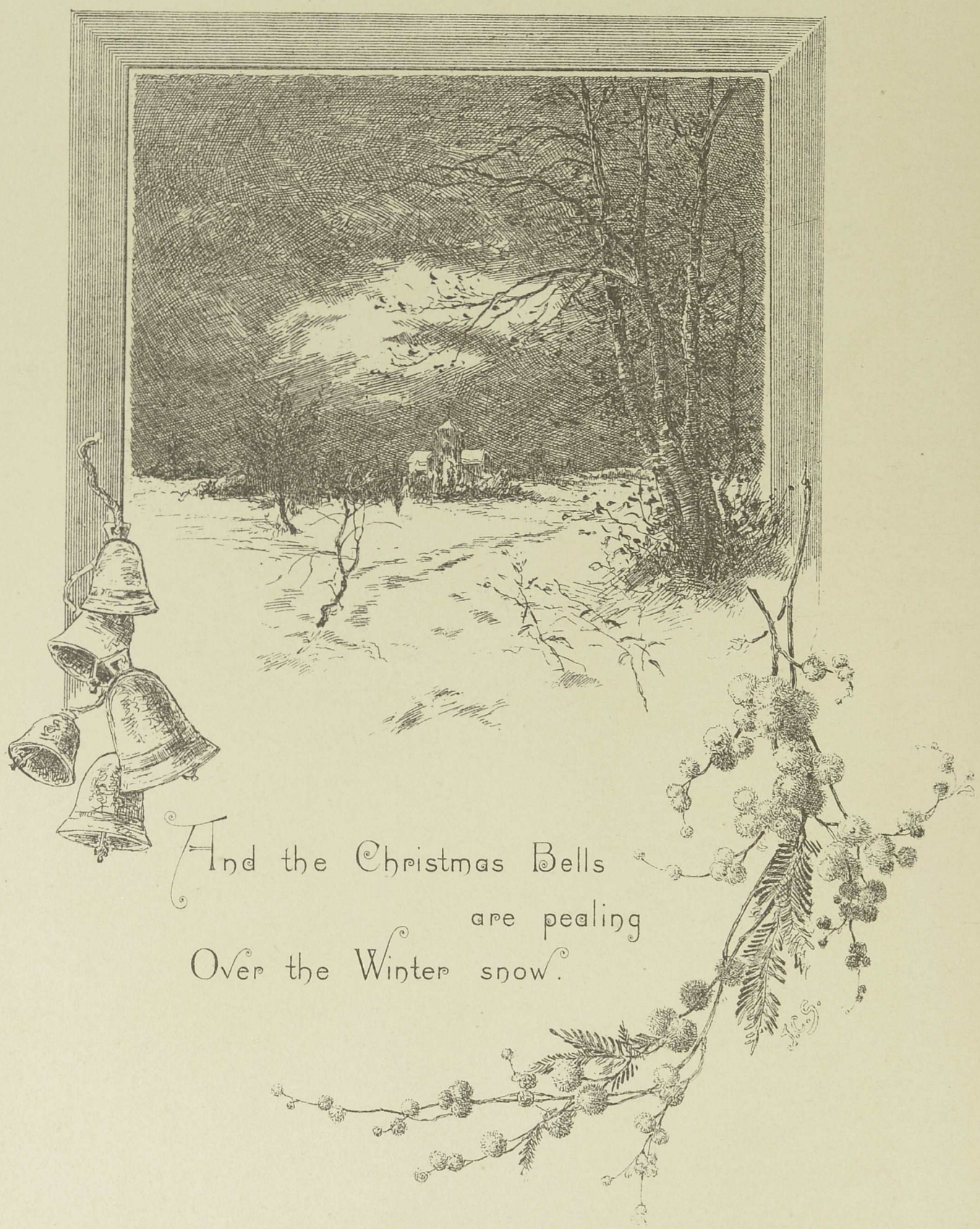
Open your hearts: there are sad hearts pleading.
Just for a tender and pitiful word;
Will you pass on with ears unheeding?
Will you go by with hearts unstirred?

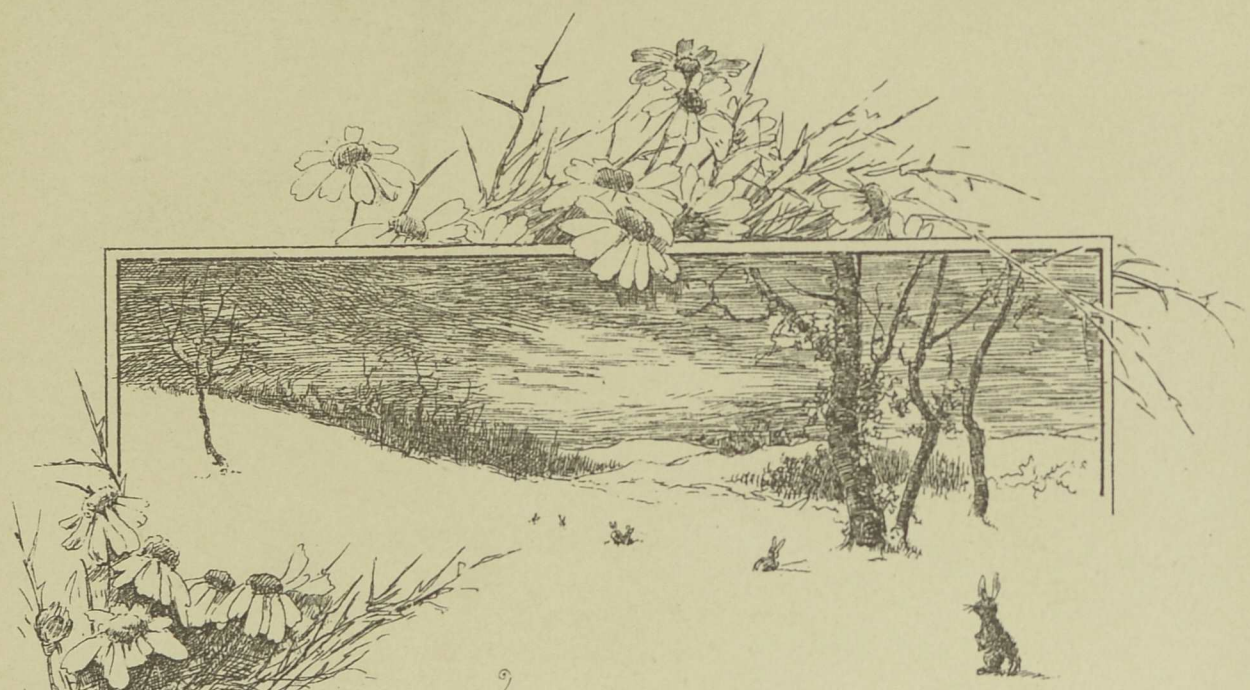
Open your hearts: there are old friends yearning
Just to be back in your hearts again;
O! is your love beyond returning?
And shall the old friends hope in vain?

Open your hearts: there are weak ones falling
Just for the help of a guiding hand;
Go to them: do ye not hear them calling?
Help them: do ye not understand?

And a light will lighten the saddest faces,
Easy life's burdens will seem to bear;
And a music shall thrill thro' the world's waste places,
Like the song of the bells on the Christmas air.

M.E.C.


And the Christmas Bells
are pealing
Over the Winter snow.



Granny's Christmas.

Do you wonder, my grave-eyed darling,
As you clamber upon my knee,
What Granny's dreams are made of,
What Christmas brings to me?
Do you wonder why she is happy,
Why with her wrinkled brow
Granny can smile, my darling,
As gladly as you do now?

Granny is old, my darling,
And she looks at the empty chairs,
But she hears your little footsteps
Upon the old oak stairs;
And she thinks of the dear ones, darling,
Who were here in the days agone,
And the feet, like yours, that pattered,
And the eyes, like yours, that shone.

And the Christmas bells are pealing
Over the winter snow,
Bringing the same sweet message
They brought me years ago,
Of Him who was born to show us
That our love is not in vain;
And that all who trust Him, darling
May meet in heaven again.

The Peasant's Christmas eve.

'Twas Christmas Eve, a bitter night,
the snow was on the ground,
The peasant's scanty fire burnt low;
the children shivered round;
Their evening meal, one little loaf,
lay on the humble board,
But one and all, with thankful hearts,
arose and blessed the Lord.

Hark! some one knocks, and yet again!
The peasant opes the door
Who wanders late on such a night
across the bitter moor?
The wind is wild, the snow is deep,
there in the dark He stands—
A little Child, with wistful eyes
and frozen lifted hands.

The peasant took Him in his arms,
the children wondering gaze,
He gently wiped away the snow,
and warmed Him by the blaze,
Then set Him in the seat they loved,
the dear dead mother's chair,
And broke the bread, and every one gave
of his scanty share.

But while upon their beds of straw that
night they sleeping lay,
The child arose and blessed them,
and softly passed away;
And for every good that comes to them
when life seems doubly drear,
They fold their hands, and whisper,
"The Christ-Child has been here."

41.

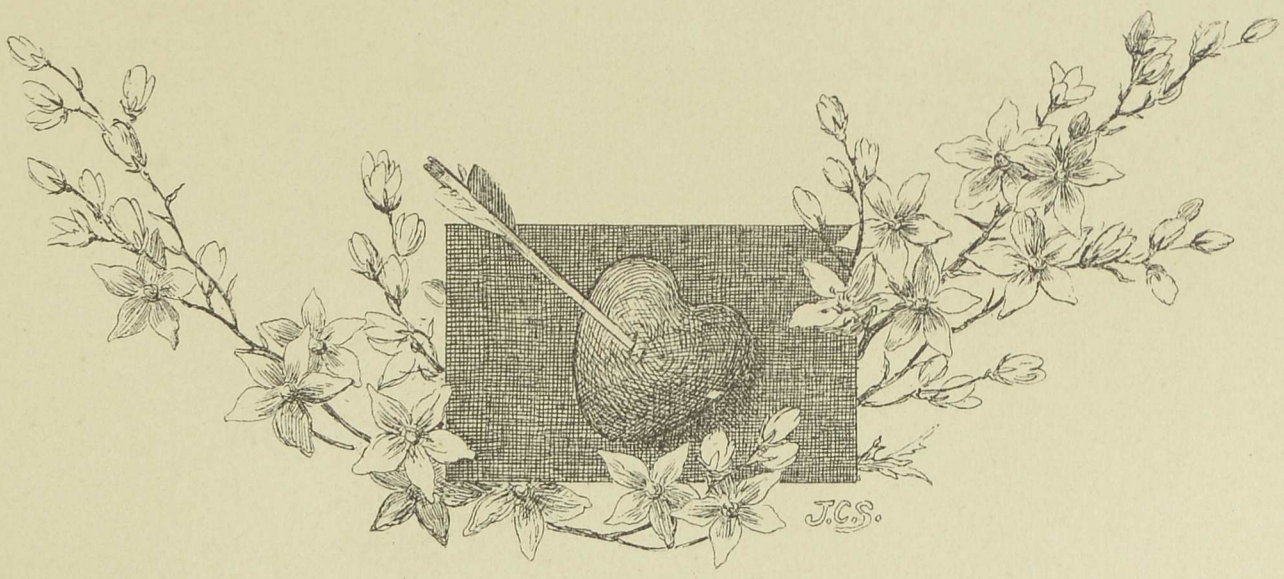
The Three Arrows.

An angel gazed from heaven, in woe,
Upon the ways of men below,
And saw a heart, like many there,
Cold, hard, and full of pride and care.
A shaft of fire the angel drew,
Down to that stubborn heart it flew,
Smote with keen wound and rankled long,
The arrow of Affliction strong.

The heart rebelled in fierce despair,
And chided heaven for all its care,
Grew dark with anger, wildly wept,
And then, like worn-out child, it slept.

A gentle shaft the angel drew,
Down to that stubborn heart it flew,
Smote with soft wound and lingered there,
—The arrow of the Strength of Prayer.

The angel looked; in meekness low
The tears of resignation flow;
In love and praise the heart is bowed,
And prayers rise like an incense-cloud.
Another shaft the angel drew,
Down to that humbled heart it flew,
Fell—like a sunbeam on a sod—
—The arrow of the Peace of God.



NEE

The Years Take all.

The Years take all — the old familiar faces,
The eyes we loved, the hands we used to hold;
And Christmas comes and marks the empty places,
While we still linger, as the days grow old.

The years take all — our darling's golden tresses,
The strong friend's arms, the old folk's silver hair;
Vain all our tears and all our wild caresses,
We cannot keep them with our deepest prayer.

We hang the holly, and the ivy clinging,
We sit and whisper where the embers glow,
We listen to the song the bells are singing,
And talk of them and wonder if they know.

Then in the twilight back they come beside us,
We hold their hands, and see them gently smile,
And then we know tho' death's dark waves divide us,
We are but parted for a little while.

Immanuel.

Is it a legend only,
A tale that dreamers tell,
That God came down from Heaven,
On earth as man to dwell?

Was there a sweeter message
Since ever the world began,
That God, whom men should worship,
Himself became a man;

That man, in faith beholding
How God in manhood trod,
Might lift his fallen nature
And grow more fit for God.

47.

Good night! good bye!
and may the Star
The Shepherds knew
was sent for them,
Shine for us also from afar
And guide our hearts
to Bethlehem!

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