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Another Easy
Christmas
Book

By Various Authors, Collected and Edited by

RUTH PUTNAM KIMBALL

Baker's Plays

178 Tremont Street, Boston 11, Mass.
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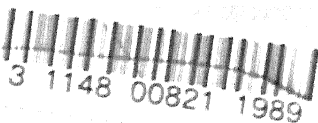
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Another Easy Christmas Book

By Various Authors

Stanzas, Plays, Pantomimes, Services, etc.

Collected and Edited by

RUTH PUTNAM KIMBALL

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BAKER'S PLAYS

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ANOTHER EASY CHRISTMAS BOOK

INTRODUCTION

Everyone likes Christmas entertainments, but no one has much time to give to them. This collection is in answer to the need for interesting programs that require little or no rehearsal and a minimum of preparation. Settings are of the simplest, and in most cases no stage or curtain is required. Pageants, tableaux, playlets, pantomimes, and services offer a choice for all types of organizations.

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THE TRUEST ANSWER

By ELIZABETH DUDLEY FERRY

CHARACTERS

CHOIR

READER

GRAMPS.

GRAN

CHILDREN

CAROLERS

MARY

JOSEPH

CHERUBS

SHEPHERDS

KINGS

ANGEL

SCENE.—*The sanctuary is dark or very dimly lighted. The chancel is lighted with candles and with flood lights so placed that they light the platform and steps, but will not shine in the eyes of the choir. Two small, decorated Christmas trees flank the altar table. The organ plays softly while the congregation is gathering. The KINGS, SHEPHERDS, and CAROLERS slip quietly into pews near the front just before the pageant opens with the processional.*

(This production is most effective if presented entirely by children of grade school age, with no adult appearing, even for an introduction. The characters in the scenes should be selected from the five- to ten-year-old children, the Choir, the Reader, and Angel should be chosen from the ten- to fourteen-year-olds.

If the scenes are carefully planned and the children chosen in advance, two rehearsals are enough, except for the Reader and the Choir. The pageant is adaptable to church schools of varying size, as all scenes may be planned for more or fewer children than here indicated. Static posing is implied for the tableaux. Pantomime will be effective, however, if sufficient rehearsals are given so that it is done well.

The setting as described presumes the use of the church sanctuary, with open chancel, altar at the rear, and choir stalls on either side. In platform type church, chairs may be put at each end for the characters in the scene, and the pulpit pushed to one side. The choir may be massed at the sides or back, but having a "living screen" adds to the effectiveness.)

CHOIR. "O Come, All Ye Faithful."

(The children in the robed choir come down the center aisle singing, and take their places on the platform and steps, forming a screen across the front of the chancel from pulpit to lectern, the tallest children in the center. The READER comes with the choir and steps into the pulpit. [As soon as the choir is in place, the CHILDREN who appear in the scenes slip into the choir stalls through the chancel door, unseen by the congregation. This is done so quietly that there is no pause. The choir must be trained never to look behind them.] The READER begins as soon as the CHOIR is in place.)

READER. *(Slowly and reverently)* Let us bow our heads in prayer. Our Father, we come into the quietness of this sacred place to remember the birthday of Thy Son. We pray that Thy blessing may rest upon all the children who have come to tell the story, and upon all who worship here. We ask it in the Name of the Babe in the manger. Amen.

CHOIR. "The Lord's Prayer" by Malotte, or a simple "Amen."

READER. We have a story to tell; the story of a search for the true meaning of Christmas. It happened not long ago in a tiny village far away in the mountains. One day a little old man and his little old wife came to this village to live. All their lives they had lived far up on the mountain, and they had never heard of Christmas. Does it seem strange to you that they were old people and yet had never heard of Christmas? Remember that they had always lived far away from towns. They had never had newspapers or radios or telephones, nor had they ever had a chance to go to church or Sunday School. That is how it happened that they had never heard of Christmas. Now at last they lived near other people, and they made friends fast. Soon everyone was calling them "Gramps" and "Gran." All the children in the village loved them and came often to see them.

SCENE I

(The Choir divides in the center, and steps back, like doors opening, to reveal the scene which some of the children from the choir stalls have posed. GRAMPS and GRAN are seated near the center of the platform. A LITTLE BOY kneels beside GRAN, holding up to her a large Santa Claus figure. A TINY GIRL stands beside GRAMPS showing him a little Christmas tree. Between GRAMPS and GRAN a THIRD CHILD stands watching. In this and all scenes the characters are motionless during the following reading until the choir again closes.)

READER. Now the days grew short, and the cold and snow came. Every day as the children stopped to see Gramps and Gran, each one spoke of Christmas.

"Christmas is coming," they would say. "It won't be long now, will it?"

"Aren't you glad Christmas is coming? I can't wait!"

And Gramps and Gran would smile and nod, and agree that it was very nice that Christmas was coming, but all the time they were wondering about it.

"What can Christmas be?" they wondered. "It must be something very nice. Everyone knows about it, and they'll think us stupid old people if they find out that we don't know."

At last Gramps made a decision. "We'll find out what Christmas is," he thought. "This very night we'll go out and look around to see if we can find out what Christmas is."

CHOIR. (*Closing across the chancel*) "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."

READER. Candles were being lighted in the village homes as Gramps and Gran started out in the snow to find out about Christmas. Down the road toward them came two children. "Hello, Gramps and Gran," they shouted. "Come on in to our house and see our Christmas tree."

SCENE II

(*CHOIR again steps back into open position. GRAMPS and GRAN are standing near the center of the platform. A LITTLE GIRL is holding out a large doll for GRAMPS to see. ANOTHER CHILD puts a decoration on one of the Christmas trees as GRAN watches.*)

READER. (*Continues*) "Your Christmas tree is lovely," said Gran, then added bravely, "What is Christmas? Can you explain?"

"Why, surely we can explain," the children answered.

“Christmas is having a tree and getting presents. Grandma sent me this doll. We’ll get lots more things—toys and books and games. Everyone gives us fine presents.”

“That’s lovely,” murmured Gran. “Christmas is wonderful. No wonder you were anxious for Christmas to come.” The old couple smiled at the eager children, but in their hearts they were sad. “So that’s what it is,” they thought. “Christmas is getting presents. Then Christmas is not for us, as there is no one to send gifts to us. Can this be all that Christmas means? Maybe we’d better look a little farther.”

CHOIR. (*Closing across the platform*) “*Good Christian Men, Rejoice.*”

READER. A little way on down the street Gramps and Gran were again invited in to share a family’s fun. Here they found everyone busy preparing food.

SCENE III

(*The CHOIR steps back. Again GRAMPS and GRAN are the center of a group. ONE CHILD is offering GRAMPS some fruit from a loaded tray. ANOTHER CHILD sits on a low stool mixing something in a large bowl, while GRAN stands watching. A THIRD CHILD sits on the floor cracking nuts.*)

READER. “We’re getting ready for Christmas,” they said.

“Christmas?” asked Gramps. “What is Christmas?”

“Why, it’s the greatest feast day of the year,” they answered, all talking at once. “We have turkey and pie and candy and just everything.”

“Feasting,” repeated Gramps to himself. “So Christmas means big feasts. That’s too bad. Gran and I don’t go hungry, but we can’t have a feast like this.

There may still be something else. I believe we'll look farther."

CHOIR. (*Closing across the platform*) "*Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly.*"

READER. As Gramps and Gran plodded on down the street, a group of little carolers came running toward them.

SCENE IV

(*CHOIR opens. GRAMPS and GRAN step to the front of the platform. A group of primary children in the traditional red capes of CAROLERS come up onto the steps from the front pews and face the congregation to sing, then face GRAMPS and GRAN during the reading which follows.*)

CAROLERS. "*Up on the Housetops.*" (*Note: This song may be omitted, and the scene posed by only a few children who have been seated in the choir stalls, as in the other scenes. However, this offers an opportunity for using quite a large group.*)

READER. "Isn't Christmas fun?" asked one of the children, when they had sung a song for Gramps and Gran.

"Christmas?" asked Gramps once more. "What do you mean? What is Christmas?"

"Why, Gramps," the children laughed, "you know it's the time Santa Claus comes. He comes down the chimney and fills our stockings with toys and candy."

"Dear me," sighed Gramps and Gran. "Surely, then, Christmas is not for us. Santa Claus never came down our chimney, and probably he won't start now. It certainly seems sure that Christmas is not for us."

CHOIR. (*Closing across the platform*) "*O Little Town of Bethlehem.*"

READER. As Gramps and Gran started sadly home-

ward their path led them by the village church. There they noticed that candles were lighted inside.

"Good evening," said a soft voice beside them. They turned to greet a young woman who was starting in toward the church. "I hope you'll have a Merry Christmas," she said.

"Thank you," Gran replied. "We are a little puzzled about Christmas. Will you please tell us what it is?"

"Christmas is the birthday of the Christ Child," the young woman answered, not seeming surprised that Gran didn't understand. "The children are telling the story of the first Christmas now in the church. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you," they answered eagerly. "We'd love to come."

So Gramps and Gran slipped into the church, and for the first time heard the Christmas story.

SCENE V

(The CHOIR steps back and remains in open position for the remainder of the pageant. The READER may be seated behind the pulpit until his next part. GRAMPS and GRAN stand toward the rear of the platform, each in front of one of the Christmas trees. In the center of the platform stands a little manger. MARY sits beside it, looking into the manger, one hand protectively across it. JOSEPH stands beside her. CHERUBS, of kindergarden age and ANGEL, stand near-by.)

CHOIR. "Away in a Manger."

(During the singing of this hymn, the NURSERY CLASS, which has been watching from the front pew, comes up to look into the manger, and goes back

down again. This gives them a sufficient feeling of participation. No rehearsal for this should be attempted. One choir child may be instructed to lead back again any child who fails to return with the others. The CHOIR continues to sing or hum until all the babies are back in their seats.)

ANGEL. (*Standing at the lectern, or on opposite side of platform from the READER, reads from a scroll:*)
“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

“And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

(During this reading, TWO LITTLE SHEPHERDS come up the steps and kneel near the manger. Their positions should be such that their faces are seen.)

CHOIR. Gloria chorus from the hymn: "*Angels We Have Heard on High.*"

ANGEL. (*Reads*) "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

"Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.

". . . and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

CHOIR. "*We Three Kings of Orient Are*"—first verse.

(During the singing three children in KINGS' robes come up the steps, lay gifts beside the manger, and take their places around MARY and JOSEPH. The group does not hide GRAMPS and GRAN.)

ANGEL. Thus it came about that the Kings, who had much, brought great gifts, and the shepherds, who had little, brought only love and loyalty, but in the sight of God all were of equal value, for the gift is but a symbol of the spirit. When the Christ Child grew to manhood, He taught the importance of love and brotherhood. When people remember His teachings, and live by them, happiness comes to the world, and peace on earth, good will to men.

CHOIR. "*Silent Night.*"

READER. As the sweet story unfolded before them,

the worry and perplexity left the faces of Gramps and Gran. Now their thoughts were happy thoughts.

“At last we know what Christmas is. All of them were partly right. It is a happy time of feasting, and giving, and being gay together, but there is more to it than that. Most of all it is the time of remembering that it is the birthday of the Christ Child, and that love is the most important thing in the world. Christmas is for us, too. Christmas is for everyone.”

CHOIR. “*Joy to the World.*”

(As this hymn begins the sanctuary lights come up.

MARY takes the doll from the manger and starts very slowly down the steps and down the center aisle. Tiny CHERUBS walk on either side of her. A few feet behind comes JOSEPH, also with an escort of CHERUBS. Other CHERUBS follow, two by two, They are followed by the SHEPHERDS, then the KINGS come in dignified single file. Next, all characters seated in the choir stalls come to the center of the platform, take partners and follow. Next come the READER and the ANGEL. Last comes the CHOIR, smallest ones first. The singing continues until the CHOIR is at the back. After the minister has pronounced the benediction, the CHOIR sings “Amen.”)

THE REAL CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

BY RUTH PUTNAM KIMBALL

CHARACTERS

THE TIRED SHOPPER.

JIM WALKER, *a farmer.*

No stage or setting is necessary. The only properties required are a plain chair placed at one side of the scene, an untrimmed Christmas tree already set in a standard, a box of simple tree ornaments, such as strings of popcorn, a few balls, and some tinsel, and for the SHOPPER a number of packages, and a purse containing a pencil and shopping list.

(THE TIRED SHOPPER comes down the aisle. She has a shopping bag full of bundles and several unwieldy packages under her arms. Her hair is untidy, and her hat is on askew. She drops a bundle or two on her way down the aisle and has to ask a member of the audience to help her pick it up, as she has her hands full. She eventually reaches the side of the stage and falls with a weary sigh and a loud "Whew!" into a chair which is there. The bundles are set down, or dropped, as the case may be. She takes off her gloves, gives her hat a push, thinks better of it and takes the hat off altogether, giving it a toss. She then takes a long shopping list and a pencil from her purse and starts to check the list.)

SHOPPER. Toilet water for Cousin Minnie.
(*Aghast.*) Oh, good heavens, was that one of those I

dropped? (*Hunts frantically around, finds the package, shakes it, and sighs with relief*) It still gurgles. (*She now finds that her coat sleeves interfere with her writing, so takes off coat and lays it across back of chair. Begins to check again.*) Tie for Uncle Joe. Not that he needs it, the old miser. Slippers for Aunt Mamic. Slippers! What I'd give for a pair right now. (*Kicks off both her shoes and stretches her toes luxuriously.*) I'm a wreck. Everyone walked on *my* feet instead of their own. If I get through this without a nervous breakdown, I'll be lucky. (*Feelingly.*) *Will I ever be glad when Christmas is over!* (*Outside c. door someone starts to sing "Silent Night, Holy Night."*) SHOPPER looks up in surprise as JIM WALKER enters dragging behind him an untrimmed Christmas tree fastened to a standard. JIM is a farmer and wears work clothes, heavy boots, and a Cardigan jacket. He closes the door, still singing to himself, and stands the tree upright.) Well, for goodness sakes, who are you? And what are you doing here?

JIM. I'm Jim Walker, ma'am. Live down on the old Walker place about three miles south of here. You must be a stranger if you don't know the Walker farm.

SHOPPER. Why should I know anything about a farm? Or care, either.

JIM. Well, it's kinda famous around these parts. Got the best grove of sugar maples in the whole county.

SHOPPER. (*Not meaning it*) Very interesting, I'm sure.

JIM. We ain't curious around here or I might ask what you were doing in our schoolhouse. You look pretty well tuckered out.

SHOPPER. If that means the same as half dead, then you're right.

JIM. Well, set a while and rest. You won't be in our way. (*He takes tree to opposite side of stage from*

SHOPPER *and looks at it approvingly.*) Nice tree, ain't it?

SHOPPER. (*Who has started checking list again; without looking up*) Uh-huh.

JIM. I cut the prettiest one I could find. Good shape and nice thick foliage.

SHOPPER. It could be the prettiest tree in the world and I wouldn't rave over it.

JIM. That so?

SHOPPER. I hate the darned things. My husband always wants me to have one in the living-room—makes him think of his boyhood days! Well, by-gones should be by-gones, I tell him. Needles tracked all over the house. Lights always burning out. And after you get the presents opened what have you got left? Nothing but an old tree drying up and needles falling all over the rugs.

JIM. (*Looking at the tree thoughtfully*) I never thought of it that way before, ma'am. Guess you haven't any children, have you?

SHOPPER. Not a one.

JIM. Folks round here kinda like Christmas trees even if there aren't any kids in the family. Sort of keeps up the old-fashioned Christmas spirit.

SHOPPER. Christmas spirit? Look at me! I'm worn to a shadow. My nerves are on edge. Only a few days till Christmas and I still haven't got all my packages wrapped, and I've got a hundred cards still to direct. I've spent all the last two weeks shopping for presents and wrapping them, and cleaning house for relatives to come to Christmas dinner—— Don't talk to *me* about Christmas spirit! It's almost the death of me.

JIM. Maybe it's the death of the Christmas spirit instead.

SHOPPER. What do you mean?

JIM. I mean—the first Christmas was a simple

thing. A baby was born in a humble stable and the people who heard the good news first were simple people—shepherds abiding in the field. Don't seem like we're keeping the Lord's birthday in the right way when all it means to us is weariness and rushing about in crowds until Christmas becomes a burden to us. That ain't Christmas—a burden and a worry. Christmas is simple things like stars in the sky and folks doing kind deeds and children singing carols.

(There is a slight pause while JIM starts decorating the tree.)

SHOPPER. Who's the tree for—the school children?

JIM. *(Continuing to decorate)* Oh, no, ma'am. It's for a family of poor folks down the road apiece. Mother and five young uns.

SHOPPER. What about the father?

JIM. He got killed in an accident 'bout four or five weeks ago. Everyone's been chipping in to order presents for the whole family. We got together and sent a big list to the mail order house—it ought to be coming in on the late afternoon train. Then folks have been giving their own stuff, too.

SHOPPER. But I don't see how—I mean, how can they — *(She stops, confused.)*

JIM. How can folks like us afford it, you mean? Well, it ain't what it costs so much—it's what we got that those folks need awful bad. Take old Aunt Hetty down at the Four Corners. She hasn't got a cent to buy anything with, but she makes awful nice braided rugs, so she gave us one of those. These folks ain't even got any rugs on the floor, and floors are kinda cold these days. Well, I'll be gettin' over to Bill Stevens' next door. He's got a telephone and I want to find out about that package down at the station. You make yourself comfortable and get rested. You look all wore

out. (JIM goes out whistling a lively carol, such as "Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly." The sound dies away in the distance.)

SHOPPER. I'd better go along if I'm going to get home. Tom'll be lucky if he even gets cold cuts tonight. Wonder if I can put these shoes on again. (She puts them on with an "Ugh!" as each one goes on. Stands up and starts to take her coat from back of chair, thinks better of it, and puts it down again. Looks toward the tree.) Bare floors must be cold these mornings. (Picks up a box from her packages.) I'll put this under the tree. Aunt Mamie doesn't need new slippers any more than she needs a new head—and not so much, I guess. She is kind of odd, but maybe I'd get to be sort of queer myself if I lived alone all the time with no one to talk to. (Places package under tree.) I'll go to see Aunt Mamie and take her—a puppy! That'll give her something to take care of and to talk to. (SHOPPER'S face relaxes into a smile for the first time.) I'll bet Aunt Mamie will love that puppy! (Crosses to her packages again with real interest in what she is doing. Pulls out another bundle.) This white angora sweater for Clarice—she likes to eat her breakfast in bed these cold mornings. (Stops at the thought.) Isn't that silly! (Repeats it as if suddenly impressed with the futility of her gifts.) Isn't that silly! (Crosses quickly to tree.) The mother can wear this under her coat—if she's got a coat. I must find out about that. (JIM enters. His face is sad.) Oh! (She is confused to be caught in the midst of her newly discovered kindness of spirit.) I—er—I thought I'd like to add my contribution—— Why, what's the matter? Anything gone wrong?

JIM. I'll say there has, ma'am. Been a washout some miles down the tracks, and the train with our presents on it can't get through tonight.

SHOPPER. Oh, how awful! Can't you drive down for the things?

JIM. There won't be time before evening. You see, we have our own family celebrations tomorrow on Christmas Eve, so we've invited the poor folks to come here tonight.

SHOPPER. Use my gifts! (JIM looks up in surprise, and the SHOPPER is almost surprised at herself.) I mean it! Use them all, if they're any good to you. Heaven knows it won't make any difference to the people who were going to get them.

JIM. Why—why, ma'am—that's wonderful! But it isn't right —

SHOPPER. (Crossing R.) It certainly is right! The wrong thing was the way I bought them—without any thought but to get the thing done. Only I'm afraid some of them are pretty silly for poor folks. (Holds up package.) This bottle of toilet water, for instance, that I got for Cousin Minnie.

JIM. (Smiling) Well, ma'am, I reckon that the mother likes perfume as well as anyone. Probably be kinda nice to get something that isn't useful, along with the rest.

SHOPPER. Of course! Why shouldn't she have something lovely and useless and delightful, as well as coats and rugs and shoes? And I'll get some toys for the children and have them sent out to you.

JIM. Well, thank you. But these things you've got here will do fine for tonight, and then by tomorrow we should be getting our box from the mail order house.

SHOPPER. (Puts on her hat and starts to put on her coat) Well, I must be hurrying along.

(Laughing voices of children heard outside.)

JIM. Here come the kids.

SHOPPER. The poor folks? (She picks up purse and starts quickly toward c. door.)

JIM. No, ma'am, some of the neighbors' children to

practice carol singing for this evening. Say, where you going in such a rush?

SHOPPER. Why, for the toys. If I hustle right along I may get there before the store closes —

JIM. Wait a bit! Here you go a-rushing again just like you were before. Thought you were going to sorta slow down and take your Christmas easy.

SHOPPER. Why, that's right. I—I forgot.

(Enter a group of CHILDREN. They shout: "Hi, Jim!" "Hi ya, Jim!" etc. He waves his hand in greeting.)

JIM. Better join us, ma'am. This is one way to get some of the real Christmas spirit.

SHOPPER. *(Coming slowly D. R.)* Perhaps—I will.

(Children group at c. with JIM at L. They start to sing "Joy to the World." JIM sings, too, and in a moment the SHOPPER suddenly flings coat and hat in chair, stands with the rest, and sings with them. At end of carol children and JIM go out at c. SHOPPER goes out through audience carrying her coat and hat. They call out "Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" to her as they leave, and she calls "Merry Christmas!" to them as she goes down the aisle.)

THE NATIVITY

BY CRAOIBHIN (*translated by* LADY GREGORY)

CHARACTERS

TWO WOMEN.

KINGS.

SHEPHERDS.

CHILD ANGELS.

THE HOLY FAMILY.

SCENE.—*A stable. The door shut on it. The dawn of day is rising, and the colors of morning coming.*

(TWO WOMEN come in—a woman of them from the East, and a woman from the West, and they tired from the journey. There is a branch of a cherry tree in the hand of one of them, and a flock of flax in the hand of the other of them.)

THE FIRST WOMAN. God be with you!

THE SECOND WOMAN. God be with yourself!

FIRST WOMAN. Where are you going?

SECOND WOMAN. In search of a woman I am.

FIRST WOMAN. And myself as well as you.

SECOND WOMAN. That is strange. What woman is that?

FIRST WOMAN. A woman that is about to give birth to a child; and I think it would be well for her, another woman to be giving care to her.

SECOND WOMAN. That is the same woman I am in search of in the same way. I did an unkindness to her, and grief and shame came on me after, and I thought to make up for it if I could.

FIRST WOMAN. Oh, that is just the same thing I myself did.

SECOND WOMAN. That is a wonder. I will tell you how it happened with me; and you will tell me your story after that.

FIRST WOMAN. I will tell it.

SECOND WOMAN. That is good. I was one evening a while ago getting ready the supper for my husband and my children when there came a man and a young woman to the door, and the woman riding an ass. They asked a night's lodging of me. They said it was up to Jerusalem they were going. But, my grief! the husband I have is a rough man, and there was fear on me to let them in; I was afraid he would do something to me, and I refused them. They said to me they were very tired, and they pressed so hard on me that I told them at last to go out and sleep in the barn, in the place the flax was, and my husband would not have knowledge of it. But about midnight my husband was struck with sickness, and a great pain came on him of a sudden, as if his death was near. When I thought him to be dying, I was in dread, and I ran out to the people I had put in the barn, asking help from them.

FIRST WOMAN. God help us!

SECOND WOMAN. God help us, indeed! And when the woman that was lying on the stalks of flax heard my story, it is what she did; she took a flock of the husks of the flax that were on the floor, and said to me: "Lay that," she said, "on the place the pain is, and it will cure him!" Out with me as quick as I could, and the husks in my hand, the same as they are now. My husband was on the point of death at that time, but, as sure as I am alive, when I put the husks on him the pain went away, and he was as well as ever he was.

FIRST WOMAN. That is a great story!

SECOND WOMAN. And when I ran out again to bring

the woman in with me, she was gone, and I heard a voice, as I thought, saying these two lines:

*“A meek woman and a rough man;
The Son of God lying in husks.”*

FIRST WOMAN. You heard that said?

SECOND WOMAN. There was grief and shame on me then, letting her from me like that, without giving her thanks, or anything at all, and I followed her on the morrow, for I said to myself that she was blessed. I heard she was gone to Bethlehem, and I followed her to this stable, for I thought I could be helpful to her, and she in that state. They told me she was not in the inn, and that there was no place at all for her to get, till she came to this stable.

FIRST WOMAN. Is not that wonderful? You said the truth when you said it was a blessed woman that was in it.

SECOND WOMAN. How do you know that?

FIRST WOMAN. Because she did a great marvel under my own eyes. My sorrow and my bitter grief! I did a thing seven times worse than what you did. It was fear before your husband was on you when you refused her the night's lodging: but the hardness and the misery in my own heart made me refuse her fruit she asked of me. She herself and the man that was with her were going by, and the day came close on her and hot, and there was a large tree of cherries in my garden. She looked up then, and she took a longing for them. "O right woman!" she said, "there is a desire come on me to have a few of your cherries; maybe you will give me a share of them." "I will not give them," said I, "to any stranger at all travelling the road like yourself." "Give them to me, if it is your will," says she, quiet, and nice, and gentle, "for I am not far from the birth of my child, and I have a great longing for them." I don't know what was the bad thing was in my heart.

but I refused her again. No sooner was the word out of my mouth than the big tree bent down of itself to her, and laid its twigs across the wall, and out on the road, till she could put out her hand and take her fill of the cherries.

SECOND WOMAN. That was a great miracle, without doubt.

FIRST WOMAN. It was so, and grief came to me for refusing her, for I knew by it that God had a hand in her. And I took this branch in my hand, and I followed her to the stable to ask pardon of her.

SECOND WOMAN. Is it not a wonder how we came here together on the same search?

FIRST WOMAN. I think she will be wanting help, for they said to me in the inn she was not far from the birth of her child, and I made as good haste as I could. Maybe we are in time to give her help yet.

SECOND WOMAN. I will knock at the door.

FIRST WOMAN. Do so.

SECOND WOMAN. Wait a while; there are strangers coming up this road from the west.

FIRST WOMAN. That is so, and look on the other side: there are great people coming from the east. We must wait till they go past.

(They sit down on either side of the door. KINGS, finely dressed, come in at the east side, and herds and SHEPHERDS on the west side.)

KING. *(Pointing upwards with his hand)* Kings and friends, it is not possible I am mistaken. Is not the wonderful star we followed as far as this standing now without stirring over this place?

SHEPHERD. O friends, look up. There is not a bird in the sky that is not gathered above this house.

KING. We are come from the east, from the rising of the sun, a long, long way off from this country, fol-

lowing the star that is standing still over us now. Where are you come from, shepherds?

SHEPHERD. We are come from the west, from the setting of the sun, a long way off from this country.

KING. And what is it brought you here? I dare say it is not without cause yourselves and ourselves are met at the door of this house.

SHEPHERD. We were sitting one evening quiet and satisfied on a grassy hill watching our flocks, and we saw all of a sudden a thing that put wonder on us. The lambs that were sucking at the ewes left off sucking, and they looked up in the sky; and the kids that were drinking at the pool stopped drinking and looked up. It would put wonder on any person at all to see the little kids looking up as wise as ourselves. We looked up then, and we saw a beautiful bright angel over our heads, and fear came on us, but the angel spoke, and he said to us that some great joy was coming into the world and he said: "Set out now in search of it, and go to Bethlehem." "Where is that?" we asked. "In a country that is called Judea," said the angel, "a long, long way from you to the east." We made ourselves ready on the morrow, and there was every sort of bird that was in the sky going before us. Look at them all now, a share of them sitting on the roof of the house, and thousands of others above in a great cloud. We are all simple people, poor shepherds, it is not fitting for us to be coming here, but there was fear on us when we heard the angel speak.

KING. It is great powerful kings we are. We come from far off, from the rising of the sun. There is not a king or a prince in these parts is fit to be put beside the lowest steward we have. And we are wise. There is no knowledge or learning to be had under the sun that we have not got. But now we are brought by the guidance of that star to the Master and the Teacher that will teach us all the knowledge and wisdom of the whole

world. It is in that hope we are come following this star. And now, shepherds, tell us what is it you want here.

SHEPHERD. We cannot say rightly what we want here. But the angel told us there was some great joy coming into the world, and we followed the birds in search of that joy, and the birds came to this place.

KING. It is likely, since the star of knowledge led us, and the birds led you, to the one place, that there is some wonderful thing in it. O friends, whatever thing is in this closed stable, it is certain it will put great fear or great joy, or maybe great sorrow, on these shepherds and on ourselves.

SHEPHERD. You who are noble and great, and rich and wise, and learned in all things, tell us what is in this stable.

KING. It is true we are noble and honorable, and learned and powerful, and wise and prudent, but we cannot tell you that. We do not know ourselves what is the thing that is in it.

SHEPHERD. Tell us this much anyway, is it sorrow or joy, grief or gladness, courage or fear, it will put on us? Will you not tell us that before we knock at the closed door?

KING. It is certain there are no other persons in the world so learned as ourselves. We are astronomers to tell of the coming and going of the stars, and the ways of the heavens, and everything that is on the earth and in the clouds and under the earth. But for all that we cannot tell you this thing.

SHEPHERD. Who will knock at the door?

KING. It is my advice to you now: the king that is youngest of us, and the shepherd that is youngest of you, to go to the door and to knock together.

SHEPHERD. Why do you say the youngest king and the youngest shepherd?

KING. Do you not know there is no person free from

sin but only infants that have never found occasion of doing it? The man that is youngest of us, it is he found least occasion to do wrong, and he is the best fitted to knock at this door, whatever there may be inside it.

SHEPHERD. (*Leading out another SHEPHERD*) This is the man that is youngest among us.

KING. (*Leading out another KING*) This is the youngest king in our company.

(The two go to the door together and knock at it. The door is opened by ST. JOSEPH, and the manger is seen, and MARY MOTHER kneeling beside the manger on her two knees, her hands crossed on her breast, and she praying.)

KING. We are come to this door to do honor to God, and to Him that God has sent. It is here all the people of the whole world will be taught, and will be put on the road that is best. Show Him to us: and we will proclaim Him to all the people of knowledge, and the learned people of the world.

SHEPHERD. We are come in search of Him who is come to put joy in the world, and to put gladness in the hearts of the people. Show Him to us, and we will give news of Him to the herds and the shepherds, and the simple people of the whole world.

ST. JOSEPH. It is great my gladness is to see you here. A hundred welcomes before you, both gentle and simple. Come in, and I will show you Him you are in search of. Look at this baby in the manger. It is He is King of the World, and He will put all the countries of the world under His feet.

MARY MOTHER. He is the Son of God.

(They all go on their knees.)

KING. We have brought gifts and offerings with us. Let us show them to you.

MARY MOTHER. Walk softly and quietly, that you may not awake the Child.

A KING. I am the king is oldest in our company. I will walk softly, and I will not awake the little One.

KING. We have brought from the rising of the sun gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and a share of every noble precious treasure there is in the world. It is not possible for the whole world to give a thing we have not with us, and we have brought another thing the world has not to give, the knowledge and sense and wisdom of our own hearts. We have been gathering it through the years, from youth to old age, and we put it first of all these things.

(They lay gold and spices, and other treasures before the CHILD.)

SHEPHERD. We have brought fleeces, and cheeses, and a little lamb with us as an offering. We have no other thing to give. We are old now, and we have got this wisdom from God, that there is nothing better worth giving than the things God has given to us.

(They put down their own offerings. The Two WOMEN come round to the front.)

THE FIRST WOMAN. Oh, do you see that?

SECOND WOMAN. King of the World, he said! Oh, are we not the unhappy sinners?

FIRST WOMAN. My bitter grief for myself and yourself!

SECOND WOMAN. I am lost forever. There is no forgiveness for me to find for the thing I did!

FIRST WOMAN. Nor for myself.

SECOND WOMAN. You were not so guilty as I was.

FIRST WOMAN. Let us go, and let us hide ourselves

under some scalp of a rock, in a hole in the earth, or in the middle of the woods!

SECOND WOMAN. Let us then hasten that we may hide ourselves.

MARY MOTHER. (*Rises up and stretches out her hands, beckoning to the WOMEN*) Come over here. Come to this cradle. The Son of God is in this cradle, and His cradle is nothing but a manger. But yet He is King of the World. There is a welcome before the whole world coming to this cradle, but it is those that are asking forgiveness will get the greatest welcome. (*The Two WOMEN fall on their knees. CHILD ANGELS come and stand on the rising ground at each side of the stable, and shining clothes on them like the colors of the morning. They lift their trumpets and blow them softly.*) Listen to the angels, the angels of God!

AN ANGEL OF THEM. A hundred welcomes before the whole world to this cradle. We give out peace; we give out good will; we give out joy to the whole world!

(*They take their share of trumpets up again, and blow them long and very sweetly.*)

OUT OF THE WOODS

BY ESTHER MACNEILL FRIEND

CHARACTERS

READER.

THE TINY TREE.

THE FOREST (*four people*).

THE MOTHER TREE.

RABBITS (*two people*).

BIRDS (*two people*).

THE BEAUTY OF THE FOREST.

THE WIND.

HUNTERS (*two*).

WORDS (*two*).

WOODSMEN (*two*).

THE FIREPLACE (*two people*).

THE SOFA (*two people*).

CHAIRS (*two people*).

THE FATHER OF THE FAMILY.

THE MOTHER OF THE FAMILY.

THE OLDEST CHILD.

THE NEXT OLDEST CHILD.

THE BABY.

EXCITEMENT.

STAGEHAND.

The cast may be doubled as follows:

THE TINY TREE (same throughout).

FOUR TREES OF THE FOREST:

2 children.

1 chair.

Half of Fireplace.

MOTHER TREE:

Mother of Family.

TWO RABBITS:

Two Hunters.

Two Words.

Half of Fireplace.

Baby.

TWO BIRDS:

Two Woodsmen.

Sofa.

WIND:

EXCITEMENT.

FATHER OF THE FAMILY.

BEAUTY:

Chair.

Once upon a time, in the midst of a great forest of fir trees¹ there grew a *tiny* little fir tree who was different.² He was a dreamer.³ His mother sort of realized that he was a dreamer but even so she couldn't understand him.⁴ His little playmate trees didn't care whether or not he was a dreamer. They just thought he was peculiar.⁵ The little rabbits that gamboled happily among the trees⁶ paid no attention to him.⁷ Little birds sharpened their bills on his limbs⁸ but they intimated that that was all he was good for.⁹

The little tree's mother worried because he was different and she often tried to teach him to be content—to be just like the other trees. She would point out to him how sweet his little playmate trees were.¹⁰ She tried to make him see the beauty of the forest.¹¹ She told him to listen to the music of the wind as it crooned through the trees,¹² to sniff the sweet odors of the fragrant woodland as they were wafted to him by the wind,¹³ but all in vain. The little tree could not be content with the beauty of the woodland.¹⁴

Why was the little tree different?¹⁵ *Why* was the little tree dissatisfied with the forest? *Why*?¹⁶

Well, it was this way. When the little tree had been a tiny, *tiny* tree,¹⁷ he had heard some hunters talking as they stole through the forest.¹⁸ "If we get away with it," said one, "we'll sure get plenty of gold." "Yep," said the other. "Sure aim t' git decked out like a Christmas tree with my share." The rest of his words were lost¹⁹ as the two men quickly stole on and out of hearing. But those magic words "Christmas tree" remained on the little tree's mind.²⁰ What was a Christmas tree that these rough men should speak of it with such high praise? What, indeed? And all the time that he was growing up²¹ the question became increasingly important to him. What was a Christmas tree? How did it look? Why did the man want to look like one? *Why*?²²

One day he couldn't stand it any more.²³ He had to ask his mother. "Mother," he said, "what is a Christmas tree?" His mother turned a little pale.²⁴ "Hush," she said, and the syllable fell raggedly from her lips.²⁵ "Hush, my son. You are too young and beautiful to think of that." The tree softened at these words from his mother²⁶ but he would not let her stop. He rose majestically to his full height.²⁷ "No, Mother, tell me now. What is a Christmas tree?" A quiver of excitement shook the forest.²⁸ What would the mother say to her child? How would she answer this great question? "My son," she said, "being a Christmas tree is every young fir tree's dream. I have tried to keep it from you because of the danger involved—but you are right. It's time you knew." The little tree was on tiptoe with excitement.²⁹ "Quick! Tell me! Tell me!" "A Christmas tree," she said, and she sighed as she spoke, "is a tree which has been taken from the forest."³⁰ It is taken to the home of Man and trimmed with bright lights and shiny tinsel and little colored balls. Man's

family dances around it and sings about it. They hang presents on it and make merry with loud shouts and great talking." The tiny tree clapped its boughs.³¹ "Oh, Mother! What a wonderful thing to be a Christmas tree! I will be a Christmas tree!"³²

"No, no!" the mother shrieked, tossing her boughs in agony.³³ "You do not realize what you say!" Slowly the little tree's excitement died down.³⁴ "Would you choose to live your life in one short week and go to tree heaven without fulfilling your destiny?"³⁵ Can it be that you would leave the beauty of the forest before you are old enough to realize my dearest wish?—Before you are old enough to serve the world as clothespins and cheeseboxes?"³⁶

It was a just reproach. The little tree found it hard indeed to disappoint his mother, though the beauty of the forest and his life there meant nothing to him. But he had chosen! He would be a Christmas tree!³⁷

And sure enough! That very year, when the air was frosty, and the stiff limbs of the forest creaked in the wind,³⁸ the woodsmen came and chose the tiny tree from out the whole forest.³⁹ They cut him down in jig-time and together they carried him off to the home of Man.⁴⁰

Yes, they carried him off to the home of Man and stood him by the fireplace.⁴¹ The time was ten minutes past eight o'clock on Christmas Eve by the clock on the mantelpiece⁴² when the woodsmen left, and the little tree always remembered it as the most exciting moment of his life—the moment before he was to become a true Christmas tree! For a few moments, no one was in the room. The tiny tree looked at the sofa.⁴³ Soon there would be people sitting on it, admiring him. He looked at the soft chairs⁴⁴ and dreamed of the time when they would hold happy children who would gaze at him and wonder at his beauty. He was only impatient for the

festivities to begin.⁴⁵ He had no regrets over his lost future of clothespins and cheeseboxes. Somehow they didn't interest him.⁴⁶

And then!—the father of the family came in with the lights.⁴⁷ The mother came in with the prettily colored balls.⁴⁸ The eldest child brought long ropes of popcorn.⁴⁹ The next oldest child brought lovely silver tinsel to make the tree shimmer and glisten.⁵⁰ And even the baby contributed his share.⁵¹ In no time at all, the tiny tree had received his gorgeous dress. He was, indeed, “decked out like a Christmas tree!”

Yes, it was a merry, merry Christmas in that house that night. When the tree had been completely decorated, the happy father sat in his armchair.⁵² The happy mother relaxed in her armchair.⁵³ The two elder children bounced happily on the sofa.⁵⁴ But the baby, looking first at the beautiful tree and then at his happy family, was the only one who could *express* the feeling that was in all their hearts, “It's the best lookin' tree in the block! God bless us—every one!”

CURTAIN

STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR THE PANTOMIME

¹ Four girls or boys walk on stage with signs: (1) WE (2) ARE (3) THE (4) FOREST. Pair off on each side of the stage, leave room between the individual, so that people can walk between easily. Arms outstretched for branches.

² Tall boy takes center of stage. Arms outstretched.

³ Boy looks dreamy—sighs.

⁴ Mother tree enters, places hand on his shoulder, looks into his face, and shakes her head. Tree keeps on looking dreamy and pays her no attention.

⁵ Four trees put heads together, pair by pair, giggle, point to Tree, heads together, giggle again, and stop simultaneously. (Should be co-ordinated and fast.)

⁶ Several rabbits, hands waving over heads for ears, hop in between trees and then hop out.

⁷ Rabbits hop in again. Each looks at a different tree, gives pear-shaped whistle, hops out.

⁸ Two birds come in flapping their arms, pull out dollar bills and sharpen them on the Tree's arms—using motion of barber stropping razor.

⁹ Birds take out nickels, scornfully put them in tree's up-turned palms. Fly away haughtily. Tree swiftly bites each nickel, says, "Cheapskates," puts money in pocket, and resumes dreamy expression.

¹⁰ Four trees giggle as before, duck heads shyly, giggle again.

¹¹ Girl slinks across the stage. She should either wear heavy glamorous make-up or be as scraggly and toothless as the actress will allow. Tree closes eyes tightly—having trouble with only one eye which strays now and again under a furtive eyelid. May finally put thumb on it to keep it shut.

¹² Wind glides in and out through trees. Trees sway. May imitate popular crooner if actor is sprightly and tuneful enough to burlesque it with solemn humor. Alternating possibility suggests a backstage phonograph.

¹³ Wind takes object resembling skunk out of pocket or from inside jacket and holds it under Tree's nose. Tree gasps, holds nose.

¹⁴ Beauty strolls back across the stage. Tree takes good look, puts both thumbs over eyes.

¹⁵ Mother tree makes sweeping gesture of despair toward Tree and looks at him sorrowfully.

¹⁶ Four trees turn toward audience, shrug shoulders as if saying, "We don't know!"

¹⁷ Tree goes down on knees with a crash if possible.

(If not possible have cushion brought and have him helped very gingerly.) Assumes "baby" expression.

¹⁸ Two hunters enter stealthily, go through forest pulling objects out of the trees' pockets.

¹⁹ Words rush on stage, dart around lamenting, "Help, we're lost!" etc., and rush out.

²⁰ Tree takes out sign reading "Christmas Tree" and ties it on his head.

²¹ Puts one foot forward and begins to rise *slowly*. This must last through the next few lines.

²² Tree is now at full height. Forest turns toward audience and shrugs as before.

²³ Tree sits.

²⁴ Pail is shoved out on stage with stick. Mother picks it up and turns it.

²⁵ Drops torn rag, first holding it so audience can see its condition. Drops pail as well (which should make a lovely clatter and startle *somebody* in the audience—especially if it's filled with rocks).

²⁶ Smirks and looks coy.

²⁷ Gets up and strikes exaggerated pose. Holds breath as long as possible—lets it out with loud "pa-a-ah!" Reader does not wait for it. Let it come where it may.

²⁸ Excitement, an Indian, enters holding bow and arrows. Holds out quiver to each pair of trees in turn and solemnly shakes them as they take hold of it. This should be a grand, straight-from-the-shoulder gesture. Exits.

²⁹ Excitement comes in. He and Tree put hands on each other's shoulders and stand on tiptoe, looking eager.

³⁰ Forest cries.

³¹ Tree claps and bounces up and down.

³² Slaps chest on word "I," coughs, Mother gives him cough drop. He says, "Thank you."

³³ Solemnly *bows* several times, tossing arms in backward circles each time she straightens up.

³⁴ Excitement falls to floor as strenuously or gracefully as actor can manage.

³⁵ Tree nods "Yes" vigorously and resumes dreamy expression.

³⁶ Beauty rushes in and flings herself dramatically at foot of Tree, hands clasped and raised imploringly.

³⁷ One hand over heart, Tree flings other hand toward Beauty in gesture of renunciation. Whether or not he pushes her remains to be settled between them.

³⁸ Trees bend arms stiffly, squeaking.

³⁹ Woodsmen enter and, standing back to back in center of stage, go through act of choosing Tree by "eenie-meenie."

⁴⁰ Tree stands rigid. Woodcutters dance a brief jig, take Tree by his outstretched arms, tip him backwards, and drag him out. Forest exits on opposite side of stage.

⁴¹ Two people come in with stockings hung on right and left sleeves. They join hands to give effect of stockings hanging from the mantel. Woodsmen drag in Tree—from opposite side of stage if possible. This will give the effect of their having walked in one direction from forest to house.

⁴² Stagehand brings in paper cut-out clock (handle on bottom) and places it in clasped hands of the Fireplace. (Clock hands must be at 10 minutes past eight.)

⁴³ Two people enter, kneel down back to back at one side of the stage—one looking toward audience and the other at the Fireplace.

⁴⁴ Two people come in with campstools or hassocks and sit down, arms bent slightly at elbows and holding them out like chair arms. Small sticks may be used to prop hands above knees. This makes the arms too narrow for anybody to squeeze into and will, of course, be widened by the chair as Father or Mother sits down.

⁴⁵ Stamps foot and looks petulant.

⁴⁶ Blows on fingernails, polishes them on coat sleeve, taps foot, and looks nonchalant.

⁴⁷ Father enters with a string of lights and starts winding them around the Tree. If possible, have them connected so that they will light when Tree has been completely trimmed.

⁴⁸ Mother enters with box of balls—hangs big one on each ear of Tree and from each wrist.

⁴⁹ Boy or girl drags ropes of Christmas tree trimmings and loops them wherever possible.

⁵⁰ Boy or girl carefully hangs tinsel, one strip at a time, over each finger of Tree's hand—then throws the rest on piece by piece.

⁵¹ Baby laboriously drags in a sled with a huge carton of Christmas presents on it. The pile should be built very high and the Baby should pull it with the rope over his shoulder, à la Volga Boatman. The Baby should be bigger than the others in the family but wear a bonnet and carry a toy to prove that he *is* the baby.

⁵² Father sits in easy chair, leans back, crosses legs.

⁵³ Mother sits.

⁵⁴ Children bounce—being careful not to break the sofa's backs.

PROPERTY PLOT

Signs for the four trees of the forest: "We," "Are," "The," "Forest."

Dollar bills for Birds.

Nickels for Birds.

Record of crooner's voice.

Skunk for Wind.

Articles for Hunters to steal from Forest.

Cushion for Tree's knees.

Sign: "Christmas Tree."

Pail for Mother to turn (stick to push it with).

Torn rag for Mother.

Bow, arrows, and quiver for Excitement.

Cough drop for Mother to give Tree.

Stockings for Fireplace.

Paper clock for Fireplace.

Campstools or hassocks.

Sticks for Chairs.

Christmas Tree lights.

Christmas Tree trimmings as indicated.

Sled and presents for Baby.

THE MANGER KING

BY JEAN ASHLEY

CHARACTERS

READER.

TWO PAGES.

MARY.

ANGEL GABRIEL.

JOSEPH.

BABY ANGELS, *four to six in number, depending on size of inner stage. May be dressed in men's white shirts worn backwards.*

ANGEL CHORUS, *eight to twelve girls.*

SHEPHERDS, *six to eight boys.*

THREE ANGELS.

TOWNSPEOPLE, *twelve to fourteen boys and girls.*

THREE WISE MEN.

KING HEROD.

TWO HIGH PRIESTS.

SCENE.—*This production may be adapted quite simply for use in any church. The original setting was in a chancel, with a large built-out stage and an inner stage very simply constructed by means of two portable platforms. Screens covered with heavy portières make an effective background. The curtain in front of the inner stage—which is pulled to reveal the tableaux—is made by means of a long rod which is clamped on the screens or flats. There are three sets of stairs—one in front and one on each side.*

I. OPENING SENTENCES (The Minister):

A Child of hope, the Manger King,
 A Child of sorrow, pain, and tears,
 Ruler of Life is He,
 The Wonderful, the Counselor,
 The Great and Mighty Lord, the Prince of Peace.
 Come, let us worship the Manger King

II. THE PROCESSIONAL CAROL—"O Come, All Ye Faithful"—*congregation remains seated.*

(*Line-up for the Processional:*

The Junior Choir.

The entire Church School, dressed in as many costumes of different countries as can be obtained—some in regular dress.

The Two Pages.

The Junior Choir and Church School sit in the first pews. The PAGES take their places on the stage in front of the inner stage.)

III. INTRODUCTORY READING:

Tonight we are going to tell you the story of a Manger King—yes, a little Baby Who has ruled a kingdom for nearly 19— years, and each year His kingdom is growing and growing. At this Christmas season, people all over the world celebrate this King's birthday. There are many stories about the birth of this Manger King. Now we are going to see and hear some of them.

MUSIC. "The Magnificat"—two stanzas.

(*As the Choir begins the second stanza—"For behold"—the PAGES open the curtains to reveal a tableau showing MARY kneeling in wonder. MARY pantomimes the remainder of the stanza. At the conclusion of the second stanza the organist plays soft background music and the READER continues. The curtain is still open.)*

READER. One day in the city of Nazareth a young woman, whose name was Mary, had a kind of dream. While she was sitting quietly by herself, the Angel Gabriel appeared before her. (*At this point the ANGEL GABRIEL appears before MARY and remains in the tableau with her until end of scene. Both the ANGEL and MARY pantomime the reading.*) The Angel greeted her and told her that he had been sent from God. At first Mary was frightened. The Angel saw this and said, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for of all the women in the world, God has favored you—for you are to be the mother of a baby whom you will call Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of God. Of Jesus' kingdom there will be no end." Mary was so very happy that she didn't know what to say and so instead she started to sing, and it seemed as if all the angels in Heaven were singing with her.

(*Enter ANGEL CHORUS single file down c. aisle. CHOIR immediately begins singing "In Excelsis Deo," the ANGEL CHORUS singing only on the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo's." The ANGEL CHORUS divides evenly on each side of the large stage, taking a profile pose on either side of the tableau. PAGES close curtains on Annunciation tableau as soon as all ANGELS have assumed their profile pose.*)

READER. (*With soft organ background*) Some months after the Angel's visit, Mary and Joseph left the city of Nazareth to go to Bethlehem in Judea, because the king had ordered that everyone in the world was to pay a tax in his home town. Since Joseph was from the family of David, his home town was Bethlehem, which was called the City of David. It was a long trip. Joseph had to walk the whole way, and Mary had to sit sideways on their donkey, who just seemed to poke along.

When they finally got to Bethlehem, it was late and already beginning to get dark. Both Joseph and Mary were glad when they reached the inn for they were both very, very tired and looking forward to a good night's rest. However, when Joseph went to the door of the inn and asked for a room, the innkeeper laughed at him and told him that there wasn't a vacant room in all Bethlehem—that there hadn't been for a week, as people from all over the world had been pouring in to pay their taxes. Poor Joseph didn't know what to do or where to go. He told the innkeeper how far he and Mary had come; how very tired they were, and that his wife, Mary, was to have a baby very soon. He pleaded with the innkeeper to let them stay the night—they would be grateful for any spot where they could "lay their heads." Finally, the innkeeper took pity on Joseph and Mary and said that they could spend the night in his stable.

It was in the stable, the same night, a few hours later, that the little Baby Jesus was born. Joseph fixed a manger with hay while Mary wrapped the newborn Baby in swaddling clothes and laid Him in His manger throne.

(PAGES *open curtain on manger scene: MARY and JOSEPH behind the manger; the BABY ANGELS surrounding the manger in prayerful adoration.*)

MUSIC—"Lullaby," by Corner, a solo sung backstage by one of the choir.

(PAGES *close curtain on tableau at the end of the lullaby solo. This tableau is a "still"—no pantomime. ANGEL CHORUS goes off stage at end of solo and takes places on either side so that they form a background against the wall for remainder of pageant.*)

MUSIC—"O Holy Night," by Adams (first stanza).

(SHEPHERDS enter from a side door during the singing of the first verse of "O Holy Night." They go on larger stage and assume sleeping positions until end of song.)

READER. (*With soft organ background*) And there were in the same country, that night, shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch of their sheep. (PAGES open curtain on tableau of THREE ANGELS with ANGEL GABRIEL in center. Remainder of reading is pantomimed.) Suddenly, the shepherds were awakened, and they saw a group of angels standing before them. The shepherds shrank back and wanted to run away, for they were very much frightened—just as Mary had been when she saw the Angel Gabriel. One of the angels spoke to the shepherds and said, "Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

(PAGES close curtain on tableau at end of reading. SHEPHERDS go out at side door as CHOIR resumes singing "O Holy Night.")

MUSIC—"O Holy Night" (second stanza).

READER. (*With soft organ background*) When the angels had left, the shepherds talked about this wonderful sight, and then one said, "Let us go to Bethlehem

and see this Baby Who is to be our Saviour. Let's hurry or we may be too late."

(At this point the SHEPHERDS start to come down c. aisle in small groups, talking and pointing ahead as they approach. As they near the stage the PAGES open the curtains on a tableau of the Holy Family—MARY, JOSEPH, and BABE in manger.)

READER. The shepherds went as quickly as they could to Bethlehem, and there in a manger they saw the Baby Jesus dressed in swaddling clothes, just as the angels had said he would be. After the shepherds had worshipped the little Baby they hurried to tell all the people they could find about this great happening. The people wondered; some would not believe the shepherds' strange tale; others went to Bethlehem to see for themselves this "Manger King."

MUSIC—"Adoration," by Borowsky (violin solo).

(At the conclusion of this reading the TOWNSPEOPLE enter from side and down c. aisle, informally; some excitedly, some doubtfully, some resentfully. They join the SHEPHERDS in worshipping the Manger King during playing of the violin solo. At end of solo the TOWNSPEOPLE go down the steps on either side of the stage and take their places in front of the ANGEL CHORUS. The SHEPHERDS remain on stage in kneeling positions. Curtain on this tableau is closed shortly before conclusion of violin solo.)

READER. On this same night that Jesus was born there was a very bright star in the eastern sky. This star was seen by three Wise Men who were traveling. (WISE MEN enter from side door, one at a time, and the three group together in formal conversation on larger stage.) They knew that this star was different—that it

was guiding them to a new-born king; so they travelled on to Jerusalem and went before Herod, the king of Judea, thinking that he could tell them where to find this new king.

(PAGES *open curtain on tableau of HEROD and HIGH PRIESTS. Remainder of reading is pantomimed.*)

READER. They said to Herod, "Your majesty, where is he that is born king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him." Herod didn't answer the Wise Men right away but told them to wait while he had a talk with his priests. Now Herod was very much worried by this news brought to him by the Wise Men—this was the first he had heard of the birth of the King of the Jews. He didn't like it. He didn't want to share his powerful kingdom with any other king, and he wouldn't if he could help it. He began his plot—how could this new king be put to death, safely? Herod's High Priest found (*one of the HIGH PRIESTS presents a scroll to HEROD*) that the prophets in the Old Testament had written that the ruler of the people of Israel would be born in Bethlehem. Herod was clever—he sent the Wise Men to Bethlehem, saying to them, "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found him, bring me word again that I may come and worship him also." The Wise Men started for Bethlehem in their search for the Christ-Child, but they were warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod. They heeded God's warning and went home another way, thus saving the new King from death for a time.

(PAGES *close curtain after HEROD sends the WISE MEN to search for the Child. WISE MEN go out by side door when READER says, "The Wise Men started for Bethlehem."*)

MUSIC—" *The March of the Magi*," by DeBois (organ solo).

READER. When the Wise Men left Herod's palace in Jerusalem and started toward Bethlehem, "lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was." When the Wise Men came to the stable they saw the young child with Mary, His mother, and Joseph, His father, and fell down and worshipped Him; and when they had opened their treasures they presented to the new-born King gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

MUSIC—" *We Three Kings of Orient Are* " (sung by male chorus).

(*Male chorus sings first verse, omitting the chorus, and going right into second verse. Sings second, third, and fourth verse with chorus—"O Star of Wonder," etc. FIRST WISE MAN starts down c. aisle when male chorus starts second verse; SECOND WISE MAN starts down c. aisle at the beginning of the third verse; THIRD WISE MAN starts at fourth verse. PAGES open curtain on tableau of Holy Family as FIRST WISE MAN approaches stage. WISE MEN kneel before manger and present their gifts, then take places outside the tableau, curtains remaining open until end of pageant.*)

READER. (*With soft organ background*) Just as the Wise Men of old laid gifts at the feet of the Christ-Child, so have people all over the world continued through the ages to bring gifts to this Manger King. Our gifts to Him are gifts of love. Tonight as we lay our gifts at the manger throne for our little friends across the sea, we can see that our own light shines a little brighter. We remember that Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk

in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

MUSIC—"Silent Night" (continuous during candle-light recessional).

(The children of the Church School, dressed in the costumes of as many different countries as possible, enter stage by twos from both sides and lay their gifts at the manger, bowing before it, then turn and go down c. aisle. Spot from rear of church is turned on them as they go. After the Church School, everyone in the cast goes to the manger, bows, picks up an electric candle and goes single file down c. aisle. Last one is the READER, who is followed by the Junior Choir. The PAGES then close curtain on Holy Family and follow Junior Choir. MARY holds lighted candle throughout this candle-light recessional.)

BENEDICTION (by the Minister from rear of church).

MUSIC

The Senior Choir sits in the chancel and is not seen by the audience. All of the singing is done by this group, except the processional carol, which is sung by everyone. One or two instrumental numbers make for variation and add to the effectiveness of the whole. A soft organ background for the READER is most effective.

COSTUMES

These can be made quite simply from odd bits of material: old draperies, evening dresses, pieces of striped or plain cotton, any shiny materials, such as silk or rayon. The expense is negligible.

LIGHTING PLOT

Crossed spotting is the best means of lighting. For the inner stage, one spot of special lavender and the other of amber will be effective for tableaux.

A spotlight in the rear of church can be turned on to light the recessional on its way down the center aisle.

If candles are used, they must be electric ones for safety, and can be placed on tables on either side of inner stage just behind the curtain.

CHRISTMAS IN SONG, STORY AND LEGEND

BY E. B. DYKES-BEACHY

CHARACTERS

FIVE READERS.*

THREE STORY TELLERS.

CHOIR.

CHILDREN'S CHORUS.

CAROLLERS.

HEAD OF GROUP SPONSORING PROGRAM.

SCENE.—*The back of the stage should be banked with large branches of cedar, spruce, pine, fir, or hemlock. Over all should be artificial snow to give the effect of a winter scene. In the rear at R. a crèche should be placed with a small doll to represent the Infant Jesus. At R. front against the wall place a table with two candles—a white candle and a bayberry candle. A grand piano may be placed at L. front or off stage if desired. A large white star should be suspended from the ceiling in the center. It is more effective if lighted with blue bulbs. Steps should lead from the platform to the auditorium for the THREE KINGS who enter from the rear and go to the crèche to leave their gifts.*

1. Organ or piano solo—Harker's "Christmas Pastoral" or Cesar Franck's "Christmas Lullaby."

* One man and one woman may read all five parts or, if you prefer, each part may be read by a separate individual.

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2. Reading—“*'Twas the End of a Syrian Day,*”
Anon. (*To be read by a WOMAN.*)

“The setting sun cast a long ray of light down a dusty road on which travelled a motley company. There were men, women, children, cattle, and sheep. Many of the company were on foot, a few rode on donkeys and other beasts, while here and there a child or an old man rode in a hand-drawn cart.

“Finally the winding, halting, hurrying line came to the rise of the hill from which, across the plain, could be seen the end of the long journey. In the distance with the rays of the sun upon it, its white walls gleaming, stood a village. It had the charm which a native town carries, it was the home of their forebears, the old, old ‘House of Bread.’ It was Bethlehem.

“As they neared the town a man drew to the side of the road the donkey which he led by a wide strap thrown over one arm. In the other hand was a staff. His dress was that of a Jew. The mantle dropping from his head and the robe which clothed him from his neck to his feet was the type of garment worn to the Synagogue on Sabbath Day.

“On the donkey rode a young woman drooping and weary from the long journey.

“That little group, the man and the woman, formed the fulfillment of prophecy; humble in appearance, yet of more significance than any people, any event since that day when the world out of mist and chaos came into being.

“According to tradition, on that night, there fell upon Bethlehem of Judea a strange and unnatural calm; the voices of birds were hushed, water ceased to flow, and the wind was stilled. The story is old—but it is ever new.”

3. *A hidden choir begins to sing “Silent Night, Holy Night” as the reader slowly retires from the stage. As the last verse is ending, a man steps slowly out on the stage and reads:*

4. The Christmas Story—*The Gospel, St. Luke II: 6-14.* “And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

5. *A hidden choir begins to sing “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” as the reader slowly retires from the stage. As the last verse is ending, an adult steps slowly out on the stage and reads the story of the Three Kings.*

6. “And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”

When Herod learned these things from the chief priests and scribes he was troubled, and sent Three Wise Men to search for the Child. “When they had

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heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them ——”

As the Three Wise Men, guided by the star, rode from the East on their tall, soft-footed camels on the first, best Christmas, they bore on their saddle bows three casks filled with gold, frankincense, and myrrh to be laid at the feet of the manger-cradled Babe of Bethlehem. The camels were of unusual size and whiteness, and moved with singular stateliness. Round their necks were tied bells of silver. Yet it was not the bells or the camels, nor the demeanor of the riders that was so wonderful. It was the question put by the man who rode foremost of the three: “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.”

The spirit of giving crept into the heart of the world with this old, old journey. As the Three Kings came bearing gifts, so we also bring gifts that relieve want, gifts that mean service, gifts that are sweet and fragrant with friendship, gifts that are still inspired by the Star that shone long ago over the City of David.

Legend has it they arrived on the Twelfth Night. Melchior, King of Nubia, the tallest of the three, bearing gold in acknowledgment of His sovereignty; Balthazar, King of Chaldea, with frankincense in recognition of the divinity; and Caspar, King of Tarshish, a black Ethiop, the smallest of the three, bringing myrrh to our Saviour’s humanity.

7. *A hidden choir begins to sing “We Three Kings” as the reader slowly retires from the stage. At the same time, the THREE KINGS approach the stage from the rear of the auditorium.*

8. *By the time the choir has finished singing the first verse and chorus, the THREE KINGS should have reached the platform. They turn and face the audience. As the first chorus ends, MELCHIOR steps slightly ahead of the other two and sings the second verse (without*

chorus). He resumes his position, and CASPAR steps slightly ahead of the other two to sing the third verse (without chorus). The same procedure is followed by BALTHAZAR, who sings the fourth verse. The choir then begins to sing the fifth verse as the THREE KINGS turn, go up on the platform, lay their gifts before the crib, and then walk off a side entrance of the stage. This should be done slowly and the choir should continue to sing the chorus over and over until the THREE KINGS have departed and the READER steps slowly out on the stage to read:

9. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts. . . . And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way."

10. (*Soft music is played as this READER leaves the stage and another enters.*)

The first Christmas carol was sung in the Holy Land by the angels who pronounced the birth of Christ to the waiting shepherds on the Bethlehem plains. The later custom of singing carols at Christmas came about through imitation of this. It is a custom that has lasted with people of many generations in all countries and grows more popular each year because the theme of all Christmas carols is to spread tidings of great joy.

In the beginning, Christmas songs were purely religious hymns, then the word "carole" came into use as the proper name for the songs. Originally, a carol was a song accompanied by dancing with the singers joining hands and dancing around in a circle as they sang. Naturally, they sprang from the folk-lore and legends of the people of various countries. Carols may be narrative, devotional, historical, legendary, or toasting songs, but the pastorals, which are among the oldest

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forms, have remained the most popular throughout the years. The story of the shepherds who heard the angels sing on that first Holy Night has appealed to the imagination of carol song-writers more than any other.

11. *As the READER finishes, carollers begin to sing and walk out on the stage. One verse of each of the various types of carols should be sung. Before each one, a member of the choir should explain whether it is narrative, devotional, historical, legendary, pastoral, or a toasting song, then give the name and composer. Many beautiful but little known old carols may be presented in this way.*

12. *Following the singing of the last carol the choir leaves the stage and an adult steps out to give the story of*

13. The Christmas Crèche.

The Christmas Crib is centuries old. On Christmas night of the year 1223 St. Francis of Assisi was meditating on the mystery of the Birth of Christ when he was struck by an idea. Why not reproduce the scene of the Nativity? The scenery was ideal as St. Francis lived on a mountain, the side of which was cut by several caves or grottoes. He called on his companions and instructed them to impersonate those present at the first Christmas. Thus, one monk was Joseph, another Mary, some were shepherds, others were angels, and there were sheep, donkeys, a cow and straw. St. Francis and other monks sang descriptive songs written for the occasion in the language the people could understand, for they did not understand the Latin of the Church. The performance was so successful it was repeated the following year. From this beginning came our mystery plays. At first carols were sung between scenes in the plays. Later, they became a part of the plays. At times the audience would join in the singing. This led to the custom of singing carols apart from the plays. It is said that the people became so enthused after singing these

songs over and over all night that they gleefully continued singing them as they returned to their homes in the early dawn. This is the first record we have of carol singing in the streets. As the custom developed, the entire Nativity scene was presented, growing to dramatic proportions and significance in the Mystery Plays. From that humble beginning, came our custom of having a Christmas Crib with miniature clay or wooden figures in our homes and churches at Yuletide.

14. *A hidden choir of children's voices sings "Away in a Manger."*

15. *As the last verse is ending, a woman steps out on the platform and walks to the table with the candles to tell about*

16. Christmas Candles.

Our present custom of burning candles is of ancient origin. From history and folklore of many nations have come beautiful Christmas candle customs. Quaint fancies perhaps, but oftentimes beautiful with a germ of truth. When the Christmas tapers are lighted, we must remember that candle-light is not just light—(*she lights the white taper*) it is a "symbol." A symbol of Christian joy and a symbol of enlightenment which should permeate every heart. Bayberry candles are America's contribution to candle-lore. (*Lights the bayberry candle.*) As you light the bayberry candle, remember that "*On Christmas Eve, a bayberry candle burned to the socket*

Brings luck to the home, food to the larder, and gold to the pocket."

Every person who lights Christmas Eve candles will have reasons of his own—reasons caused by memories of happy Christmases that have gone before, and faith in happier Christmases to come. (*Soft music is played as READER leaves the platform and another appears.*)

17. Christmas Customs.

We do not know what Christmas means to you. Most

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of us cherish fond memories of our first impressions—Santa Claus, the immortal spirit of giving, toys galore, books, red and white candy canes sticking out of bulging stockings, the glittering tree, carollers, the holly, mistletoe, popcorn balls, the bells, smiles. Then the sleep that comes only to exhausted, bewildered children. Did we realize that the Spirit of Christmas is *giving*?

Now it is Christmas time again. Under many names and guises, Santa Claus will be welcomed by children everywhere because Christmas is essentially a festival of childhood—"For unto us a Child is born." The bringer of gifts in each country is different. And, because of the many nationalities of the people who make up our great land, our Christmas customs vary in different parts of our country. We find that most of them have been adopted from foreign lands. The carols, gift-bearing, and stars go back to the Holy Land; from Germany comes the huge assortment of Christmas cakes and cookies, the friendly tree with its lights, gifts, and decorations. Holland gave us Santa Claus via Saint Nicholas; the people of France and Belgium taught us to hang our stockings in the chimney corner. From France comes the lantern; the poinsettia from Mexico. Our English cousins gave us interesting words and cards, the friendliness of open house, the joy of plum pudding, and the flowing punch bowl. The southern habit of fireworks is an old Spanish custom which came by way of Mexico. About all we can lay claim to is the turkey—and don't forget the mince pie.

18. (*Soft music is played as the READER retires from the stage and another appears.*)

And now the season returns when we must re-tell the Christmas story—the season when the notes of "*Silent Night, Holy Night*" bring back poignant memories of all the Christmases we can remember. And you are planning to *observe* Christmas? (READER then reads the story "*Keeping Christmas*" by Henry Van Dyke.)

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(*Soft music is played as the READER retires from the stage and another appears. This should be the president of the club, superintendent of schools, Sunday School, or whoever is head of the organization putting on the program.*)

19. May this year bring to your home the happiest holidays it has ever known. May those you love rest tranquil and secure through every day that lies between this Yuletide and the next. May your Christmas be a festival of Love, Joy, Cheer, Faith, and Happiness made possible to us through age-old songs, stories, and legends. To you and yours—a Merry Christmas.

20. *Piano, organ, or choir may present some gay Christmas song as the audience disbands.*

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

This program has been arranged for presentation by adults for adults. It may be augmented or shortened as desired. Musical numbers may be changed to suit the individual taste. The size of the stage will determine the number of participants. It has been arranged so that every member of a club or class may be included on the program. Those not taking active speaking parts may join the carollers.

It is not necessary to have a rehearsal for the program. If each one prepares his own part and follows the program carefully it will work out all right. Be certain that the Three Kings understand what they are to do and that the carollers understand the size of the stage to plan their grouping.

The speaking parts should be assigned to men and women who will read the parts from scrolls with distinct, resonant voices.

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

The musician as well as the men and women assigned

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to the speaking parts may use their own judgment regarding clothing. Long evening dresses on women look better on a platform than short dresses. If convenient, men may wear long, black choir robes. They may be made out of sateen or some inexpensive material.

The Three Kings should be played by men with good singing voices. Each King should wear an elaborate jewelled turban wound around the head, with the material of the turban hanging to the waist from the back of the head. Colorful bathrobes may be worn as robes, but the belts should be bright and jewelled. Each king should carry a dark, richly colored velvet pillow. On the pillows, Melchior carries a cask of jewels, Balthazar carries an incense burner with burning incense, and Caspar carries branches of myrrh (or a bottle of perfume).

The carollers should be dressed in robes—long, flowing white robes for the women with red caps and capes; long, black robes for the men.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It is impossible to give acknowledgment for the source of all of the material used in this program. I found "*'Twas the End of a Syrian Day*" in an old scrapbook. It had been published years before, anonymously, in a magazine. I do not remember the magazine so cannot give credit to the magazine or the author. The biblical quotations are from the Bible. Much of the other material has been adapted from an article written by the author—"Our Rich Heritage of Songs on the Nativity" published in the December, 1941, issue of *Musical America*—and a similar article published in the December, 1946, *Etude*.

THE HIDDEN MANGER

BY KARIN SUNDELOF-ASBRAND

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR.	CHORUS OF CHILDREN.
NINA.	TWO ANGELS.
PHILIP.	MARY.
RACHEL.	JOSEPH.
AARON.	THREE KINGS.
	OFFSTAGE VOICE.

SCENE I

NARRATOR. As our pantomime begins, we see Nina and Philip, son and daughter of Rachel and Aaron of Nazareth, playing in their father's garden while waiting for their parents to make ready for the journey to pay their taxes.¹ After a time, Nina becomes tired, and sinks down wearily on the garden seat.² Philip sits resignedly beside her.³ He tries to get her to play some more with him, but she refuses, saying she wants to be rested to make the long trip.⁴ Philip notices that it is getting dark, and looks worriedly toward the house, as if hoping his parents would hurry out. Nina also looks about at the gathering dusk, nodding in agreement with Philip's haste.⁵ Suddenly, it grows bright, and Philip points excitedly to the sky, where a brilliant light is seen.⁶ He says he has never seen so bright and big a star, and Nina, after looking at it, cries out that it is so bright it hurts her eyes.⁷

She looks again,⁸ then runs toward the house, calling her mother.⁹

Rachel and her husband Aaron enter the garden from the house,¹⁰ curious as to Nina's excitement. Nina runs in front of them, pointing to the star,¹¹ and Aaron studies the sky carefully.¹² Rachel, however, is indifferent to the phenomenon,¹³ and hurries Nina into her cloak.¹⁴ Aaron turns to his wife and speaks thoughtfully to her¹⁵ of the dream that Mary, his sister, had of the Angel who prophesied the birth of her son, Jesus. While he is speaking, Philip and Nina come close,¹⁶ and Rachel, suddenly recalling that Mary and Joseph have already set out, is struck with worry for Mary.¹⁷ Aaron reassures his wife,¹⁸ telling her the star¹⁹ was a part of the prophecy of the Angel, and that Mary is to be taken care of. But Rachel refuses to believe in Mary's dreams²⁰ and turns away from Aaron. Nina tugs insistently at her mother's sleeve, saying that she, too, had a dream last night, and begs to tell it.²¹ Rachel asks idly what it was she dreamed,²² and Nina looks deeply into her eyes while she recites her dream of an Angel showing to her a hidden manger.²³ At this point, Philip interrupts her²⁴ to ask if there was gold in the manger, but Nina shakes her head reprovingly,²⁵ and answers, "Nay, a little Babe. The most beautiful Baby in all the world, surrounded by singing angels and kings." Rachel smiles benevolently at the child,²⁶ then turns to call Aaron from his star-gazing,²⁷ and they prepare to begin their journey.

(*Chorus of children.*²⁸)

NARRATOR. Suddenly two radiant Angels appear before the little family,²⁹ and Aaron falls on his face in adoration.³⁰ The children and Rachel gaze in fascination at the heavenly visitors.³¹ One of the Angels touches

Aaron, and commands him to rise and go quickly to Bethlehem.³² Aaron's face lights with joy and adoration,³³ as the Angel bids him to fear not, for a Child is born that shall be the Saviour of all men. The second Angel helps Aaron to rise,³⁴ and enjoins him to keep his faith always with him.

(*Chorus offstage sings "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men," as the ANGELS exeunt.*³⁵)

NARRATOR. Aaron stares after the Angels in awe, and Rachel steps to his side, wonder and fear in her face.³⁶ The children stand together, hand in hand,³⁷ and all are lost in wonder at this miracle.³⁸ Aaron speaks gently to his wife, saying slowly, "It is as the Angel hath said to Mary: 'Thou shalt have a Son, and He shall be called Jesus.'" ³⁹ Rachel nods ⁴⁰ as one in a dream, and gathers her family to her, to follow the star to Bethlehem.⁴¹

CURTAIN

(*If no curtain is available, the lights may be dimmed briefly to indicate the passage of time.*)

SCENE II

NARRATOR. Hours later, Aaron, Rachel, Nina and Philip are walking wearily down a side path on the outskirts of Bethlehem.¹ At last Nina catches up to her father, and complains that they have looked long for Mary and Joseph, but have not found them.² Aaron nods, and looks at his wife,³ who reassures the impatient

child that soon they shall find the couple in a rude shelter somewhere near.⁴

(Actions⁵ through¹² in KEY TO ACTION. Narration ends here for duration of tableaux.)

KEY TO ACTION

¹ Nina and Philip chase each other around the stage, laughing.

² Nina stops running, pushes her hair back from her face, and sinks wearily onto the garden seat.

³ Philip, looking disgusted, sits resignedly beside her.

⁴ Philip tries to get his sister to play more with him, takes her arm, trying to pull her up, but Nina throws off his hand, and tells him she wants to rest. She motions him away, and points off to Jerusalem.

⁵ Philip looks around him, noticing how dark it has grown, and calls Nina's attention to it. She raises her head and nods in approval of his haste, and both look anxiously toward the house, R.

⁶ Philip points to the bright star, L., calling Nina's attention to it.

⁷ Nina looks at the star, then covers her eyes, protecting them from its brilliance.

⁸ She looks again, fearfully, at the star.

⁹ Nina runs toward the house, R., fear in her face, calling her mother.

¹⁰ Rachel and Aaron enter, R., dressed for the journey, and evidently asking Nina what she is so excited about.

¹¹ Nina, coming from behind her parents, runs in front of them, pointing to the star, at which Philip is still gazing.

¹² Aaron shades his eyes and looks intently skyward, seeming carefully to be studying the stars.

¹³ Rachel glances upwards and shrugs indifferently.

¹⁴ Rachel catches Nina, and places her cloak around her shoulders, fastening it in front.

¹⁵ Aaron turns to his wife, placing a hand on her shoulder, and speaks gravely to her.

¹⁶ Philip and Nina run over to stand by their parents as Aaron is talking of Mary's dream. Philip, who has been standing rapt u. l. with Aaron, comes d. c. and Nina holds Rachel's hand l. c. Both children listen intently to their father's words.

¹⁷ Rachel puts her hand to her mouth, worry and fear written on her face.

¹⁸ Aaron pats his wife's shoulder, telling her not to worry.

¹⁹ He points to the star, reminding her it is a part of the Angel's prophecy, nodding, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

²⁰ Rachel, unconvinced, turns away from Aaron to make Philip ready for the journey.

²¹ Nina runs to her mother and tugs insistently at her sleeve, begging to be heard.

²² Rachel tweaks Nina's ear, and asks carelessly what it is she dreamed.

²³ Nina clasps her hands and looks deeply into her mother's face. She points upwards, to picture the Angel coming to her, and spreads out her hands as she turns to R.

²⁴ Philip makes a deprecatory gesture with his hand, interrupting her story to ask if there was gold in the hidden manger.

²⁵ Nina shakes her head quietly and holds an imaginary Babe in her arms. She looks wonderingly about her as she tells of the singing angels and the kings bringing gifts.

²⁶ Rachel smiles benevolently, and pats Nina on the head at the end of her story.

²⁷ Rachel calls to Aaron who has again turned to

study the star, U. L., and begins to hustle her family off stage, L.

²⁸ Chorus of children starts across stage R. to L., singing "*O Little Town of Bethlehem.*" They move off stage L. as two Angels enter, R.

²⁹ First Angel stops in front of Aaron slightly R. of C., and second Angel moves across stage to L.

³⁰ Aaron falls to his knees, arms outspread, forehead touching the ground.

³¹ The children and Rachel gaze, fascinated, at the Angels.

³² First Angel touches Aaron, lifts him upright on his knees, and points toward L.

³³ Aaron looks up and smiles joyfully at the Angel's words.

³⁴ Second Angel helps Aaron to his feet.

³⁵ Chorus sings "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,*" as Angels exeunt, L.

³⁶ Rachel steps to Aaron's side, evidently afraid, and in need of his strength.

³⁷ Nina clasps Philip's hand.

³⁸ All four stand motionless for some time, gazing offstage, L.

³⁹ Aaron turns to Rachel and, pointing after the Angels, tells her again of Mary's dream, nodding gravely during the recital.

⁴⁰ Rachel nods slowly, her fear and disbelief dissolved into a sort of awe.

⁴¹ Calls Nina and Philip and leads the way off stage, L.

SCENE II

¹ Aaron, Rachel, Nina, and Philip enter R., walking wearily, Rachel leaning on Aaron's arm, the children hand in hand behind them. Philip kicks stones as he scuffs disconsolately along, and Nina raises her head to look crossly around her.

² Nina runs to catch up with Aaron and pulls at his cape. He stops and looks down at her as she complains.

³ Aaron nods, frowning, at Nina, and turns to Rachel.

⁴ Rachel fondly toys with Nina's hair, smiling down at her, and explains by pointing and looking around her that they should find Mary and Joseph anywhere now.

⁵ Nina lags behind, her head hanging, to wait for Philip who once more takes her hand, sighs, and walks on.

⁶ They all walk on slowly, and exeunt L.

⁷ Chorus offstage sings "*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*" while two Angels enter at L. and R. Each rolls back a half of the stable door, revealing Mary seated D. R. Joseph stands slightly in back of her, L. C., and both bend over the Babe in Mary's lap.

⁸ Three Kings enter, L., bearing gifts, walking slowly, and looking about them.

⁹ Melchior kneels at the R. of Mary and Joseph. Caspar kneels at L. Balthazar stands behind Melchior U. R. facing audience, his head bowed, looking down at the Babe.

¹⁰ The singing stops, and a voice offstage reads: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*" Chorus offstage sings softly "*Away in a Manger.*"

¹¹ As children begin to sing, Rachel, Aaron, Nina, and Philip re-enter at L. Aaron kneels with bowed head, L. C., at sight of the group. Rachel throws her cloak over head at extreme L.

¹² Philip and Nina walk hand in hand to Mary, then kneel, backs to the audience, gazing down at the Baby in Mary's lap. Children's chorus sing "*Silent Night*" as curtain falls.

STAGING

SCENE I

The whole may be done simply with dark curtains forming as shallow or deep a stage as desired. Plants, flower boxes, and a low seat draped with colorful shawl lend the effect of the garden. A flashlight or electric light with white bulb may be used as the eastern star, at L.

SCENE II

Two folding screens may enclose Mary and Joseph until the Angels pull them aside and stand behind the group throughout the tableau. This is fully as effective as an inner curtain, which also may be parted by the Angels, and held. A flashlight inside a white cloth, preferably net, gives the effect of the Babe.

The Narrator reads the script, and copies of the Key to Action, given to the four principals, aid in rehearsals.

A MOTHER'S CHRISTMAS STORY

BY ESTHER KISSELL KARRES

CHARACTERS

MOTHER.

BETTY, *aged eight.*

BILLY, *aged six.*

FIGURES IN TABLEAUX

MARY.

JOSEPH.

ANGEL.

WISE MEN.

SHEPHERDS.

SCENE: Living room of a home in the United States.

TIME: Christmas Eve.

The scene is a section of a living room. It is Christmas Eve, and holiday decorations have been completed. A fireplace with illusion of glowing fire is D. R. Greens and red tapers are on the mantel, and two stockings hang from it. A lighted, decorated Christmas tree is U. L. At R. C. is an armchair.

(As the curtain opens, MOTHER is seated in the chair with a book in her hands. BETTY and BILLY are on the floor in front of her, BETTY a little to the L., and BILLY to her R.)

MOTHER. (*Reading*)

"He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.

"He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
'Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!'"

BETTY. I never get tired of hearing "*The Night Before Christmas.*"

MOTHER. Yes, I like it, too—everybody likes it. I imagine that this Christmas Eve, right now, this poem is being read to children in many homes.

BILLY. (*Going to fireplace*) Say, do you suppose Santa Claus will have trouble getting down our chimney? That hole doesn't look very big for a "chubby and plump" fellow.

MOTHER. (*Smiling*) Oh, I think he'll find a way.

BILLY. I know—but with a great big pack—'n' steam-shovel—and a sail-boat——

BETTY. (*Going to tree*) Mother, isn't the tree beautiful?

MOTHER. Yes, it *is* lovely. The brightly colored ornaments, sparkling lights and glistening icicles, and the star at the very top make it seem almost unreal—like something from fairyland.

BILLY. (*Goes to MOTHER and sits on arm of chair*) Tell us again about the *first* Christmas tree, will you, Mother?

(*BETTY sits on floor by MOTHER.*)

MOTHER. Why, yes.* A long time ago, in Germany, a man named Martin Luther was walking home one

* MOTHER may read story from a book, if desired.

Christmas Eve. On the way he stopped to admire the beautiful winter scene in the park. It had been snowing for some time, and now the branches of the evergreens were bending low from the soft, fleecy snow. And the silver moon and glittering stars shining down, made it look as though there were millions and millions of tiny sparkling lights all over the trees. When Martin Luther reached home, he tried to tell his family about the beauty of it, but couldn't seem to find words to express his thoughts and feelings. Suddenly, he dashed out into the garden, cut off a small fir tree, and took it into the children's nursery. Then he put some candles on it and lighted them.

BILLY. (*Breaking in*) And all the children in the neighborhood liked it and wanted a Christmas tree, too.

MOTHER. That's right. Many people in his country placed evergreen trees in their homes at Christmas time, and later the custom spread to England. But it is in our own country that we have brilliantly lighted Christmas trees as our *special* custom. We have them in our homes, churches, and stores—and large community trees in public squares around which people, old and young, gather to sing carols.

BETTY. But people sing Christmas carols in all the countries, don't they?

MOTHER. Oh, yes, and in some countries—England, France, Czechoslovakia—the townspeople sing carols as they march in processions to church on Christmas Eve.

BILLY. Do all the children everywhere hang up their stockings on Christmas Eve for Santa Claus to fill?

BETTY. Oh, no, Billy, in Belgium the children put their wooden shoes on the doorstep on Saint Nicholas Eve, as they call it—and the next morning they find their shoes filled with toys and candy!

MOTHER. The Norwegians have a thoughtful custom, I think. There the people see that the *birds* have their own Christmas trees. On Christmas morning they

tie sheaves of wheat or corn to poles for the winter birds to eat.

BETTY. My teacher says that in Italy, instead of a Christmas tree, they have an "Urn of Fate." The children and their friends, in order of their age, put their hands in a large vase and draw out their gifts.

BILLY. And in China they shoot firecrackers! I'd like that.

MOTHER. So, you see, all over the world children and adults, too, have their own special way of celebrating Christmas—but no matter what the custom is, it is an expression of joy and love, of making others happy, of presenting gifts to loved ones, just as the Wise Men presented their gifts to the Baby in the manger on that very first Christmas—because it is the birthday anniversary of the Christ-Child. . . . And now, since it's almost bedtime, shall we have the story of the first Christmas?

BETTY. Yes, and let's turn out the lights and sit in front of the fire—as we always do. (BETTY helps MOTHER move chair in front of fire.)

BILLY. And Betty and I'll picture the story in the fire as you tell it to us. (BILLY turns out Christmas tree lights, and he and BETTY sit on floor in front of fire.)

(As MOTHER begins the story, offstage orchestral music of "Silent Night" is heard. BETTY and BILLY remain looking at the fire during the MOTHER's story.)

MOTHER. Long, long ago in a land far away, Joseph and his wife, Mary, traveled toward the little town of Bethlehem. The road was crowded with people who were going there to pay taxes. Mary rode a small, gray donkey, and Joseph walked beside her. It was night when they reached the town—and when they ar-

rived at the inn the innkeeper told them there was no more room. "But," he said, "you may sleep in the stable if you wish." Joseph thanked him, and he and Mary made their way to the stable where they lay down in the hay amongst the cattle and sheep. That night—in the stable—a wonderful thing happened. A little Baby was born—and Mary was His mother. Mary wrapped the Baby in swaddling clothes and gently laid Him in a manger.

(Music should be timed so that "Silent Night" ends with "laid Him in a manger.")

TABLEAU—MARY AND THE BABY JESUS.

MUSIC—"Away in a Manger"—offstage chorus.

(During following speech, chorus hums or sings softly "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" or "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.")

MOTHER. And there were in the same country that night, shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flocks of sheep. Some of the shepherds were lying on the ground asleep, while others watched that the little lambs did not stray far away. The stars twinkled in the sky—and all was quiet on the hillside, except for the occasional bleating of a lamb. Suddenly, a great white light shone all around—lighting up the heavens and the fields below. And then—an angel appeared before them. The shepherds were afraid and crouched to the ground. But the angel said to them, "Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The shepherds were no longer afraid of the angel and lifted their faces to him in awe. And the angel said, "This shall be

a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

TABLEAU—ANGEL AND THE SHEPHERDS.

MUSIC—" *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (vocal solo).

(*As story continues, offstage chorus sings "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," rising to a crescendo on line "and on earth, peace, good will toward men."*)

MOTHER. And then—all at once, many, many angels—a multitude of angels—came down from the heavens, all praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (*Chorus continues to end of selection.*) After the angels had gone from them into the heavens, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem, and see

this Baby, who is Christ, the New-Born King." They hurried to the town, through the narrow streets, until they reached the inn. And there, in the stable, were Mary and Joseph, and the Baby lying in the manger. After the shepherds had gone away, they told others of the wonderful things that had happened, and the news spread quickly over the countryside.

Far away, in another land, three Wise Men heard the "good tidings of great joy." They carefully packed rich gifts for the Christ-Child, got on their big, strong camels, and rode swiftly across the desert sands. And lo, there appeared in the sky, a beautiful, bright new star—more beautiful and brighter than all the others. One of the Wise Men whispered, "The Star of the East—that is our guiding light."

TABLEAU—THREE WISE MEN AND STAR.

MUSIC—" *March of the Three Kings* " (French carol—sung by male chorus).

(*As story continues, offstage chorus sings softly—*
 “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”)

MOTHER. The Wise Men travelled many, many nights—always following the Star, until they reached the town of Jerusalem. They asked of the people, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.” But no one—not even Herod, the king—had heard that the Christ-Child had been born. The king sent for his chief priests and scribes. They said, “The baby for whom the Wise Men are looking is in Bethlehem.” When the king told the Wise Men where the baby would be found, they got on their camels and rode away. Again the Star of the East went before them, until, at last, it rested over the place where the baby lay. The Wise Men went quietly, reverently, into the stable and found the Baby with His Mother Mary—and they fell down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh and gave them to the Baby.

TABLEAU—THE NATIVITY.

MUSIC—“*Adeste Fideles*” (Offstage chorus).

(*During next and last speech, chorus sings softly*
 “Joy to the World,” *increasing in volume as the*
lights fade slowly.)

MOTHER. And so, in tribute to the Christ-Child who was born long ago in the Little Town of Bethlehem—each year, all over the world, people celebrate Christmas Day in the spirit of that very first Christmas—of peace on earth, good will toward men.

(*Curtain falls slowly, or, if no curtain is available,*
firelight goes out, leaving stage in darkness.)

78 A MOTHER'S CHRISTMAS STORY

TABLEAU I—MARY AND THE BABY JESUS

The manger is at c. with MARY kneeling behind it, looking down at it. There is straw in the manger and strewn over the floor. A flashlight or electric light bulb in manger will suggest spiritual radiance emanating from it.

TABLEAU II—ANGEL AND THE SHEPHERDS

ANGEL, with upraised arm, stands u. l. c. Four or more SHEPHERDS are on floor in groups. Their poses suggest fear and awe.

TABLEAU III—WISE MEN AND THE STAR

WISE MEN pose looking at the Star of the East. One may be at c. with back to audience and pointing to star. The other two are d. l. Lighted white star is suspended from ceiling over area u. r. White spot is trained on star.

TABLEAU IV—THE NATIVITY

Setting and lighting effects are the same as in Tableau I. MARY sits or kneels behind manger. JOSEPH stands a little above her. Three WISE MEN, carrying gifts of jewels, frankincense, and myrrh, are approaching stable. SHEPHERDS, in groups of twos and threes, are kneeling with bowed heads. Some are inside stable, others in area in front of it.

PRODUCTION PLOT

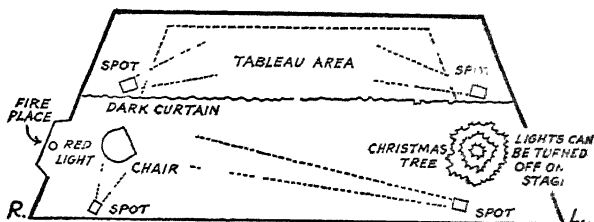
The stage is divided into two parts, the action for the playlet taking place on the downstage half, and the tableaux on the upstage half. A black or dark blue curtain divides the two playing areas of the stage and serves as the rear wall of the room where the Mother

and children are sitting. This curtain is drawn aside before, and closed after, each tableau. If curtain is not available, screens can be used effectively. They should be fitted with handles in back so that stage crew can easily move them apart before and after each tableau.

LIGHTING PLOT

When Billy turns off Christmas tree lights, the stage is in darkness, except for red glow from fireplace. Figures of Mother, Betty, and Billy are only faintly visible.

No light must shine toward the dividing curtain. The people taking part in the tableaux can then take their places without being seen by the audience. On the cues for the tableaux, the dark curtain is drawn back, and the tableaux are cross spotted (see diagram). A dreamlike effect is achieved for the tableaux if one spot is special lavender or surprise pink and the other is amber.



COSTUME PLOT

Costumes for Mother, Betty, and Billy are modern, the children being dressed in pajamas and bathrobes, if director desires. Costumes in tableaux are traditional biblical ones. Wings for the Angel can be cut from cardboard, covered with glue, and sprinkled with artificial snow. The costumes of the Wise Men should be

rich and colorful in contrast to the drab grays and browns of the Shepherds. The Shepherds carry crooks.

MUSIC

The music is an essential part of the performance, and, to be effective, should be perfectly timed. During the tableaux, chorus continues to end of number even if the curtain has been pulled, after which Mother continues story. When presented for school assembly programs, there is an opportunity for both orchestra and glee club to take part in offstage music. In Sunday School or club performances, where orchestra is not available, an organ or chorus humming the background music may be substituted.

IN SKYLAND

BY MABEL BISHOP GILMER

CHARACTERS

MOTHER GOOSE.	SUNBEAMS.
NORTH WIND.	SILVER BELL.
SNOWFLAKES.	ELVES.
THE MAN-IN-THE-MOON.	SANTA CLAUS.
JACK FROST.	CHRISTMAS STAR.
ICICLES.	CHRISTMAS ANGEL.

SCENE: The palace of the North Wind.

TIME: Christmas Eve.

SCENE.—*A bare open space backed by a vivid blue sky and bordered with pointed firs (or any evergreen). A snowy mountain is silhouetted against the sky at U. L. A false proscenium of sparkling white, with a gold crescent moon and one large star at C., frames the scene (optional). A tall stool stands vacant in front of the proscenium at R.*

(MOTHER GOOSE, in typical costume with spectacles and high hat, enters through the audience after the auditorium lights have been lowered. [MOTHER GOOSE is spotlighted when the stage is dark and is in darkness when the stage is lighted.] She carries a large, oblong book with black cover upon which a white goose is plainly visible. Mounting the apron of the stage she seats herself upon the

stool, and after a friendly greeting opens the book and reads the story of each scene preceding the action, except the last Episode, which should be synchronized.)

EPISODE I—NATURE

SCENE 1

MOTHER GOOSE.

Oh, the North Wind lives in a palace beyond the mountain snows.

She decks her hair with crystals and wears blue sky for clothes.

The Snowflakes are her children. She chases them about until worn out with running they fall to earth tired out.

There she leaves them sleeping and calls the Man-in-the Moon.

He comes up slowly, peeping, singing their cradle-tune.

VOICE. (*Offstage, accompanied by violin or piano*)

Loo-loo, laloo,

Loo-loo, laloo,

Laloo, laloo, la—l-o-o.

(PANTOMIME.—NORTH WIND *in a filmy garment of irregular lengths and contrasting shades of blue is discovered asleep at the foot of the mountain. Her arms and legs are bare, their whiteness accentuated by the brilliant scarlet of her lips and nails. Her hair hangs loose from a sparkling bandeau which encircles her head. She awakens slowly to the plaintive music of the moon-song. Rising, she looks questioningly about, listens, then goes eagerly to the four points of the compass as though seeking someone, her gaze reaching above and beyond the audience. At front stage L. she turns suddenly and faces upstage R. with a gesture*

of joy and recognition, followed by repeated commands to enter. One little SNOWFLAKE ventures in a short distance and then flutters back to be joined by another. NORTH WIND bends to coax at their level and rises to beckon others still offstage. In response to her pleading the two drift shyly down stage R. followed by a group of three, behind which the others come crowding in. NORTH WIND drops back against the snow mountain as they enter. When all are in, she drives them downstage in a tempestuous rout. She gradually herds them into one flock at C. where they form a double circle and swirl in opposite directions. Still in this formation she sways them back against the blue sky with uplifted arms, where they break apart and are driven by NORTH WIND, first into the evergreens at L. and then to the opposite side where they gradually droop and settle close to the trees. NORTH WIND with a sweeping gesture calls the MAN-IN-THE-MOON to come and sing their cradle song. [A musical accompaniment adds to the effectiveness of this snow-storm scene.] A large gold crescent moon appears from behind the snow mountain [at L. at a reasonable height.] In it, with knees crossed and holding a lute [mandolin or other suitable musical instrument] sits a small boy in close-fitting costume of silver or light gray cloth which entirely covers him, except for hands and face, and ends in points at wrists and feet. [The stage lights have been gradually reduced and the Moon spotted.] The MAN-IN-THE-MOON bends over his lute and sways gently with the rhythm of the MOON'S lullaby sung off stage. NORTH WIND, in the same rhythm, as if she were crooning, lulls the SNOWFLAKES to sleep and then, lying down upstage, she also sleeps. The stage is darkened. Moon song is repeated several times and fades out.)



Loo-loo, la-loo, Loo-loo, laloo, La-loo, La - loo, la - loo.

SCENE 2

MOTHER GOOSE.

And now Jack Frost comes springing across the mountain snows.

With each wild leap he is bringing a frost-bite for your toes.

He nips your cheeks when merry and paints bright red your nose.

Then silently and busily he creeps along the ground
Among the leaves and grasses and ties them closely down.

When North Wind is sleeping he is sure to be around.

Now the earth is frozen, he looks thoughtfully about.

One more task remains for him before the Sunbeams rout.

With stinging hand-clap east and west, he calls the Icicles out.

Wearing swords for helmets, with icy pointed toes

They stand close together in rigid, haughty rows.

When one moves they all move, and all go when one goes.

Clickle, clackle, how they crackle!—slip and slide and pelt.

When the Sunbeams find them they are very sure to melt.

(PANTOMIME.—JACK FROST leaps upon the stage from behind the mountain or stage L. He wears a close-fitting white costume with stocking cap, and white shoes. He carries a short wand with a small bell at each end. There are also small bells attached to his costume so that a light tinkle is heard

as he moves about. A small pail and long-handled paint brush are attached to his belt. He discovers the SNOWFLAKES and taps their toes with his wand, darting back each time. At c. he painstakingly detaches the pail from his belt, and flourishing the red-tipped brush makes darts at their noses. Tired of this sport, he returns to c. where he looks thoughtfully about. Seized by a sudden inspiration he loudly claps his hands. In quick response the ICICLES march awkwardly in and form a line against the back drop. They stand equal distances apart and perform a humorously stiff drill, then move forward as one, a step at a time with a rigid gesture accompanying each step. The drill is repeated front stage and ends with a salute to JACK FROST. [Music for the drill is desirable, such as "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers."] At the moment of their salute, the SUNBEAMS [small children dressed in yellow tarlatan and carrying wands] run upon the stage and drive the ICICLES to the trees at L. where they comically tumble and melt to a reclining position opposite the SNOWFLAKES. The SUNBEAMS retire or can be grouped U. R.)

EPISODE II—HUMAN NATURE

SCENE I

(Sleigh bells are heard.)

MOTHER GOOSE. (*Listening*)

Jingle bells, jingle bells!

What is this we are hearing?

(*Sound of bells repeated.*)

Jingle bells, jingle bells!

Can Santa Claus be nearing?

Listen! Hark!

(Sound of bells repeated.)

You all know well
 The Christmas Fairy—Silver Bell.
 She rings the merry Christmas bells,
 The coming of Santa she foretells.
 Silver Bell—Silver Bell!
 The merry Christmas Fairy.

(PANTOMIME.—SILVER BELL appears in a full-skirted, light green tarlatan dress trimmed with red ribbons and wearing a holly wreath. She carries a wreath of bells which she rings tambourine fashion above her head as she enters and again at c. where she makes a complete circle and then goes r. to summon the ELVES. Stage lights are lowered and a “click, clack” is heard offstage.)

SCENE 2

MOTHER GOOSE.

Click, clack! Who comes to town?
 Santa's Elves all dressed in brown.
 They pick the chimneys he goes down.
 Click, clack! Have you heard
 That they never say a word?
 But they listen and they know
 Just where Santa's sure to go.
 Merry Elves, so wisely dumb.
 Click, clack! Here they come.

(PANTOMIME.—The ELVES [small boys in brown paper or cambric costumes with fool's caps and stockings of the same color] enter one in front of the other and jog-trot to front stage where they form a line and perform a dumb show in unison, looking up and then down with hand to eye, right

and left, then placing one finger on lips and shaking their heads in negative they trot to rear and sit cross-legged against the back drop with arms folded. [This can be amplified and is improved by music.])

SCENE 3

MOTHER GOOSE.

Now Santa comes from his loaded sleigh
 To ask North Wind the very way
 She will send her Snowflakes flying,
 For he must go over the snow
 Ere the day is dying.
 His loaded pack from off his back
 He takes with quite a gusto.
 All kinds of toys for girls and boys,
 And gifts for old folks, too.
 He is sure to bring just everything.
 What more could he do?
 But the time is late and the "Jolly Old Saint"
 Must be upon his way.
 Children are abed, their prayers all said,
 Waiting for Santa Claus' sleigh.

(PANTOMIME.—SILVER BELL rings her bells and rushes upstage to welcome SANTA CLAUS who appears in customary costume with pack on back. She leads him down stage c. where he drops his pack close to the footlights, and shaking with laughter and with finger on nose winks at the audience. He opens his pack and brings out a variety of gifts for children, then a humorous one for adults. The ELVES dart forward and torment SANTA. He tries to catch them, but they are too quick for him. Finally he ties up his pack and motions for SILVER BELL to waken NORTH WIND. NORTH WIND comes forward, and SANTA queries

which direction—north, south, east, or west—she will send her SNOWFLAKES. She points northwest [U. L.], and, wakening the SNOWFLAKES, drives them off stage. JACK FROST leaps from the ever-greens and sends the ICICLES flying. SILVER BELL follows, leading the way for SANTA, who is followed by the ELVES and SUNBEAMS. NORTH WIND alone remains. She continues to wave farewell as long as the bells ring.)

EPISODE III—DIVINE NATURE

SCENE I

(PANTOMIME.—*Shortly after the bells cease, distant singing is heard. [One or more stanzas of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" are sung offstage, gradually coming nearer.] NORTH WIND listens in wonderment. When the music stops, the CHRISTMAS STAR enters [adult or high school age]. He wears a flowing but dignified garment of silver [or gray] and purple. A large star rises from a band around his head. He greets NORTH WIND and they bow formally. They pantomime the words with seriousness and solemnity as read by MOTHER GOOSE. [Gothic gestures, while not necessary, are most effective.]*)

MOTHER GOOSE.

The Christmas Star so long foretold
 Would seek out earth as once of old.
 "Oh, North Wind, free as light and air,
 I pray thee, tell me, how goes one there?"
 North Wind starts back in grave surprise:
 "The way to earth!" she cries.
 "How can it be that you come here
 To ask of me the way to earth?"

"Right well you know," the Star replies,
 "That I cannot leave these stellar skies.
 But there is one most wondrous fair
 Who seeks to find her way down there."
 "I am needed on earth," she sighs.
 "Who may this fair stranger be?
 Go, bring her quickly here to me.
 If her heart holds for human-kind
 A gift more worthy, more sublime,
 Than even Santa's generous heart,
 To her I'll gladly show the way.
 Depart!"

(The STAR goes out.)

SCENE 2

(PANTOMIME.—"Holy night" is heard offstage
 [*violin or voice*]. The STAR returns with the
 CHRISTMAS ANGEL. Her costume is of the Fra
 Angelica type in rose and gold. [*Dress of gold or
 white and cape of rose.*] She greets NORTH WIND
 and they all act out the following.)

MOTHER GOOSE.

More beautiful than any dawn on near or distant lands!
 North Wind bows low and asks to know what gift lies in
 her hands.

"Love gives herself," the Angel cries,

"And finds her deepest joy

In service and in sacrifice—

Pure love without alloy."

"No greater gift could any give, than this you take
 with you.

North Wind doth gladly show the way to one so pure
 and true."

"One question I would ask of you before I take my way.
 Will the people of earth receive me in their hearts, I
 pray?"

“Dear Angel, that I cannot say,” and North Wind turns away.

Then of her guide the Angel asks the question over again,

“When I reach earth will I be received within the hearts of men?”

Gently the Star leads her forth.

“Have patience, hope and trust.

Not from any wind of the north

Will your true answer come.

Ask the children ere you depart,

Will each receive you in his heart.”

(PANTOMIME.—*The ANGEL comes forward alone and reaches out her arms in supplication to the audience as MOTHER GOOSE says:*)

MOTHER GOOSE. “Will each one of you receive in your heart the Angel of Love, Peace and Good Will toward all men on Christmas Day and forever?”

(*All join in singing “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”*)

PRODUCTION NOTES

This pantomime may be elaborated or simplified in production. It can be played as straight pantomime or adapted to the dance. A curtain is not necessary. All changes of scene can be effected by the alternate use of floods and spots. The mountain can be a set piece or stylized, using a white, silvered, or sparkling curtain for one-third of the back drop, which can be partly drawn to reveal the moon. The moon can be firmly established at the top of a high stepladder, which is concealed by a curtain like the sky or the mountain, or with evergreen branches. Evergreens may be used in place of a back drop. Remember—this is a fantasy.

PUNCH AND JUDY

REVISED BY FRANK RONSI

(The following story of the rascally Punch is an edition of the combined Italian and English versions, shortened, modernized, and re-written.)

CHARACTERS

PUNCH.	POLLY.
GOOFUS.	POLICEMAN.
TOBY.	DEVIL.
SCARAMOUCHE.	DOCTOR.
JUDY.	KETCH.
BABY.	ALLIGATOR.

PROLOGUE

(Enter PUNCH. After a few preliminary squeaks, he bows three times to the spectators: once in the center and once on each side of the stage, and then speaks the following:)

PUNCH.

Ladies and gentlemen, how do you do?
And you, and you, and even you, too.
Watch me quite closely and soon you will see
What an obstinate, misbehaved fellow I be!

(PUNCH exits laughing. A shy, dopey character named GOOFUS sneaks out to the center of the stage

and after a few false starts, quite embarrassed, says:)

GOOFUS. Errrrrrrrrr . . . ahhhhhhh . . . Act One . . . I think. (*He exits and PUNCH enters calling:*)

PUNCH. Judy . . . Judy! Judy darling! (*Enter the dog, TOBY.*) Hello, Toby. I didn't call you. I called Judy.

TOBY. Bow wow wow!

PUNCH. Glad to hear it. Here, Toby. Nice Toby.

TOBY. (*Snarls*) Arrrrrr! Arrrrrr!

PUNCH. (*Putting out his hand*) Nice Toby!

TOBY. Arrrrrr! Arrrrrr!

PUNCH. Ohhhhhhh—HUSH! (*PUNCH swings at TOBY, misses and TOBY grabs his nose between his teeth. They tussle around the stage with PUNCH screaming for TOBY to let go of his nose. TOBY lets go finally and exits as PUNCH stands there nursing his nose and moaning.*) Oh, my nose! My poor, beautiful nose! My pretty little nose! Oh, you bad dog! I'll tell your master on you. (*Calls.*) Mr. Scaramouche! Hey, Scaramouche!

(SCARAMOUCHE *enters with a stick.*)

SCARAMOUCHE. Did you call, Mr. Punch?

PUNCH. (*Seeing stick*) Oh, oh! (*PUNCH retreats to the other side of the stage and peeps around the curtain.*) Hello, Mr. Scaramouche. (*Aside.*) Ooooooh, what a stick!

SCARAMOUCHE. You've been beating my dog.

PUNCH. He's been biting my nose. What have you there in your hand, sir?

SCARAMOUCHE. A fiddle.

PUNCH. Can you play that fiddle?

SCARAMOUCHE. Come here and I'll show you.

PUNCH. No, thank you. I can hear it from here.

SCARAMOUCHE. Then play it yourself. Can you play?

PUNCH. I can try. (PUNCH takes the stick and dances around the stage singing "Pop Goes the Weasel." When he comes to the "Pop" he hits SCARAMOUCHE a light blow with the stick.)

SCARAMOUCHE. That's very good, Mr. Punch. Now let me try. (SCARAMOUCHE sings the song and when he comes to "Pop" he hits PUNCH a little harder than PUNCH hit him.)

PUNCH. I don't like the way you play. Listen to me. This will kill you! (Once again PUNCH sings. When he comes to the "Pop" he hesitates a second and then on each "Pop" he hits SCARAMOUCHE as follows:)

Pop, goes the weasel!

Pop, goes the weasel!

Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop, Pop goes the weasel!

(SCARAMOUCHE lies dead on the stage.) How do you like that tune, my friend? (He swats SCARAMOUCHE and knocks him below.) That's the way to do it! (He throws away the stick and calls JUDY.) Judy! Judy! Judy, my love!

(JUDY enters.)

JUDY. Well, what do you want?

PUNCH. (Aside) Isn't she beautiful?

JUDY. What do you want, I say?

PUNCH. A kiss. I want a kiss from your pretty lips. (He kisses her and she slaps him.)

JUDY. There's a kiss for you. Would you like another?

PUNCH. No, thank you. One at a time, my pretty wife. Fetch me the child, darling. (Exit JUDY.) There's a wife for you. Isn't she beautiful? Brrrrrrrr! She is going to fetch our child.

PUNCH AND JUDY

(*Recenter JUDY with the BABY.*)

JUDY. Here's the child. (BABY *bawls.*) See, it knows its father.

(PUNCH *grabs the BABY.*)

PUNCH. Give it to me. Pretty little thing. It looks just like its mama. (*The BABY screams.*) I didn't mean it, baby. Get out of here. You scare the child. (*Exit JUDY. PUNCH sings:*)

Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top.

When the wind blows, the cradle will rock.

When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall.

Down will come baby, cradle and all.

(*The BABY screams. PUNCH makes all kinds of weird sounds to amuse the BABY, but the BABY screams on. He places the BABY against the side of the stage and screams:*) Ohhhhhhh . . . HUSH! (*The BABY stops. PUNCH slowly walks to the other side of the stage, watching the BABY. When he reaches the other side, the BABY screams again. He dashes back and hits it a box on the ear. The BABY screams anew. He picks it up and bangs it against the side of the stage.*) There! There! There! There! How do you like that? That will stop your crying! Get out of here! (*He throws the BABY over the footlights.*) That's the way to do it!

(JUDY *reënters.*)

JUDY. Where is the child?

PUNCH. Gone—gone to sleep.

JUDY. What have you done with it?

PUNCH. I dropped it out the window. I thought you'd catch it.

JUDY. Ohhhh, you beast! Ohhhh, you cruel man!
(*She cries aloud.*)

PUNCH. Don't cry, Judy. It didn't bounce when I dropped it.

JUDY. I'll make you pay for this. [Exit JUDY.]

PUNCH. All that fuss about nothing.

(JUDY re-enters with a stick, pulls up behind PUNCH and gives him a whack.)

JUDY. I'll teach you to drop my child out the window.

PUNCH. Easy, Judy!

JUDY. You nasty, cruel brute! I'll teach you. (Hit.)

PUNCH. She's not fooling!

JUDY. No, (hit) I'm (hit) not! (Hit.)

PUNCH. Stop it!

JUDY. No! (Hit.)

PUNCH. Very well, then. Now it's my turn to teach you. (He struggles with her and gets the stick away. He chases her about the stage, hitting her with the stick. She then hangs over the stage, gasping. PUNCH takes aim with the stick, swinging right up to her head on each of three counts:) One! (Aim.) Two! (Aim.) Three! (Aim.) FOUR! (He kills JUDY, who hangs dead over the front of the stage.) That's the way to do it! (He dances about the stage swinging his stick. Pretty POLLY appears in front of him as he reaches one side of the stage.) Oh, oh! (Nose to nose POLLY slowly backs him to the other corner of the stage. PUNCH leans over the footlights.) HELP!

POLLY. Hello, handsome.

PUNCH. She means me! (With his stick he knocks JUDY below and grabbing POLLY he dashes off shouting:) OFF WITH THE OLD . . . ON WITH THE NEW!

(GOOFUS appears and after staring dopyly around says -)

GOOFUS. Errrrr ahhhhhhhh . . . Act Two . . . I think. (GOOFUS *disappears* and PUNCH *enters*, *humming*. *There is a loud knock*.)

PUNCH. Who goes there?

POLICEMAN. Open up in the name of the law!

PUNCH. Oh, oh! (*He ducks out of sight and returns with his stick*.) Come in!

(*The POLICEMAN enters*.)

POLICEMAN. Do you see my stick, sir?

(PUNCH *hits him over the head*.)

PUNCH. Do you feel mine, sir?

POLICEMAN. You mustn't get fresh with the law, Mr. Punch. You have committed murder and must answer for it in court.

PUNCH. Court? Court? I'm on my way to court my pretty Polly.

POLICEMAN. I'm afraid you'll have to come with me, sir.

PUNCH. And I'm afraid that you're afraid to take me.

POLICEMAN. Mr. Punch, you have very bad manners.

PUNCH. The same to you.

POLICEMAN. Take your nose away from my face, sir.

PUNCH. Take your face away from my nose, sir.

POLICEMAN. Phooey to you, sir!

PUNCH. Phooey to you, too, sir! (PUNCH *hits the POLICEMAN*.)

POLICEMAN. You have assaulted a police officer. It is my painful duty to lock you up.

PUNCH. And it is my painful duty to knock you down. (*He kills the POLICEMAN with a blow and shoves him out of sight*.) That's the way to do it!

(The DEVIL rises and moans.)

DEVIL. Beware, Mr. Punch, beware! *(He sinks out of sight.)*

PUNCH. *(To the audience)* Did you see what I saw? It's enough to make me sick. In fact it did. Ohhhhhh, I'm dying. . . . Ohhhhhhhhhhh! Ohhhhhhhhhhh! Is there a doctor in the house?

(The DOCTOR pops up right beside him.)

DOCTOR. Did someone call me? Oh, it's Mr. Punch. I declare, he looks dead. Let me listen to his heart. *(The DOCTOR puts his ear to PUNCH's chest and listens. There is an audible thump, thump and then a low rumble.)* He doesn't seem to be dead. Mr. Punch, are you dead?

PUNCH. Yes. Please bring me back to life.

DOCTOR. Where are you hurt? Is it here? *(He touches PUNCH's head.)*

PUNCH. Nope . . . lower.

DOCTOR. Here? *(Touching PUNCH's breast.)*

PUNCH. Nope . . . guess again.

(The DOCTOR goes down out of sight.)

DOCTOR. Here?

PUNCH. Yes, right there. *(He lifts his stick and hits the DOCTOR.)*

DOCTOR. Oh, my head! You must be sick. It even hurts me. I'll go get you some physic. *[He exits.]*

(PUNCH confides in the audience.)

PUNCH. What a doctor! He forgot to bring a physic.

(*The DOCTOR sneaks up behind PUNCH with a stick and hits him over the head.*)

DOCTOR. Physic . . . physic . . . physic.

PUNCH. What kind of medicine is that?

DOCTOR. Stick medicine.

PUNCH. Then I'll give you a taste of your own medicine. (*Swats the DOCTOR with his stick.*) Physic . . . physic . . . physic.

(*The DOCTOR shrinks to the corner.*)

DOCTOR. Pay my bill and I'll go.

PUNCH. How much do I owe you?

DOCTOR. Five dollars.

PUNCH. O. K. (*He hits the DOCTOR with his stick.*) One! Two! Three! Four! Five! That settles the bill and the doctor, too. (*He knocks the DOCTOR below.*) That's the way to do it.

(*The DEVIL rises and moans.*)

DEVIL. Beware, Mr. Punch, beware! (*He sinks out of sight.*)

PUNCH. (*To the audience*) You saw that, didn't you? You saw that? That was the devil. Ohhhhh, I'm a doomed man. Take me away . . . take me away!

(*KETCH, the hangman, pops up.*)

KETCH. Glad to oblige.

PUNCH. Who are you?

KETCH. I'm Jack Ketch, the hangman.

PUNCH. Me and my big mouth.

KETCH. Come along, Mr. Punch. (*KETCH drags PUNCH off stage.*)

(GOOFUS *appears carrying a gallows which he sets up in one corner of the stage.*)

GOOFUS. Errrrrrr . . . ahhhhhhhhhh . . . Act Three
—I think. (GOOFUS *exits and KETCH enters dragging*
PUNCH.)

KETCH. Now, Mr. Punch.

PUNCH. (*Seeing gallows*) Oh, what a pretty tree.

KETCH. It is not a tree, Mr. Punch. It is the gal-
lows. You are going to hang.

PUNCH. What for?

KETCH. You broke the law.

PUNCH. Broke it? Go on, I didn't even bend it.

KETCH. At any rate, you are to be hanged for mur-
der. Hanged by the neck until dead. Place your head
in the noose.

(PUNCH *pokes his head on one side of the noose.*)

PUNCH. Like this?

KETCH. No! No!

(PUNCH *pokes his head on the other side.*)

PUNCH. Like this?

KETCH. No! No! That will never do!

PUNCH. Well, how should I know? I've never been
hanged before.

KETCH. I suppose I must show you how. Watch me
closely. You see my head? You see this noose? Put
the head in, so!

PUNCH. And pull it tight—so! (*He jerks the rope*
and hangs KETCH.) That's the way to do it! I don't
think I'd be afraid of the devil.

(*Up pops the DEVIL.*)

DEVIL. Did you call me?

PUNCH. Speak of the devil and up he pops. How do you do, your majesty? Nice weather we're having.

DEVIL. It's going to get warmer for you.

PUNCH. (*To the audience*) I wonder what he means? Well, it's been nice seeing you. . . . Good-bye. (*He starts to go.*)

DEVIL. Just a minute, Bub. You are going with *me*.

PUNCH. Oh, no, I'm not!

DEVIL. Oh, yes, you are!

PUNCH. Oh, no, I'm not!

DEVIL. Oh, yes, you are!

PUNCH. We shall see. (*He darts below and returns with a stick.*) See what I mean. (*He swings at the*

DEVIL. *The DEVIL ducks out of sight.*) I guess I showed him who's boss. (*Up pops the DEVIL with a stick and he swats PUNCH on the back of the head.*)

Oh, my head! Please, Mr. Devil, let us be friends.

(*The DEVIL hits him again.*) Don't you know your best

friend when you see him? (*The DEVIL hits him again.*)

Hey! You hurt! (*The DEVIL hits him again.*) That

did it. Now, we'll see who's boss—Punch or the Devil!

(*There begins a terrific battle between PUNCH and the*

DEVIL. *In the beginning PUNCH gets the worst of it,*

but as the DEVIL grows tired, PUNCH picks up strength

until he has the DEVIL over the stage, panting.) I can't

kill you, Mr. Devil, but I sure can knock the devil out

of you. (*A last swat and he knocks the DEVIL below.*)

That's the way to do it! Oh, me, I'm tired. I think I'll

have a nap before my date with pretty Polly. Oh me

. . . oh me . . . (*He leans against the side of the stage*

and falls asleep. As he begins to snore, an ALLIGATOR

sticks his snout over the wall. Here begins the sus-

sense. The ALLIGATOR sniffs around and then sniffs

PUNCH. *As he slowly opens his mouth, PUNCH awakes*

with a start. The ALLIGATOR ducks out of sight.)

What's that? (*He looks all around and finding no one*

he goes back to sleep. Once again the ALLIGATOR appears and does exactly as before. PUNCH awakes and looks all around.) Did you see anybody? I must be dreaming. (He goes back to sleep again. The ALLIGATOR re-appears and this time he grabs PUNCH who starts screaming. He drags PUNCH out of sight, PUNCH screaming all the while. The screaming ends abruptly and we get the idea that PUNCH made a nice meal. GOOFUS appears.)

GOOFUS. Well, folks . . . that's all—I think.

(Up pops the ALLIGATOR. He opens his mouth, and we hear PUNCH's voice.)

PUNCH. That's the way to do it!

(The ALLIGATOR grabs GOOFUS and drags him below. PUNCH was a villain—to THE END.)

BELLE-WRINGING

BY ESTHER MACNEILL FRIEND

CHARACTERS

TWELVE MEN AND WOMEN OR TWELVE GIRLS.

More may be added if necessary.

This skit, if presented just for fun, may be given with only one or two rehearsals. Mistakes will add to the comic effect.

At least eight persons are needed to be the bells, or notes, in this skit and more should be added if the range of any song is obviously more than eight notes. Each person sings one note only but he must sing it each time it occurs in any song so it is advisable to use girls with good ears and memories as well as good voices. The eight stand in a row, dressed alike if possible. (Girls may wear black or white skirts and red blouses; men may wear dark or white pants and white or red shirts. Or they may all wear choir robes.) Behind the "belles" should be a bench or chairs for the "wringers." There may be one "wringer" to each "belle" or one "wringer" for each two "belles." The "wringers" should be as rhythmical as the singers, since their function is to nod, or wring, the head of the "belle" at the proper split second of time to make the bell appear to sound in response to being rung. If the "belles" object to hair pulling, have the girls wear large bows of red ribbon and have the men wear stocking caps with "handles" attached securely to the top. (Cardboard will do.)

A lot of fun can come from telling one person to hold a note of one particular song, or to sing it as if the bell were not ringing true. This should be entrusted to a person who can keep a straight face while his "wringer" goes into contortions trying to fix him. The other belles, of course, should pay no attention to the proceedings.

After the "belles" and "wringers" are in their places the "wringers" should recite:

We hear the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play.
We hear the Christmas Party bells
The wishes of the season tell.

Though some of them are out of tune
From being beat with metal spoon,
We now will (w)ring our bells in time
To make for you a Christmas chime.

Wringers then play the scale up and down and play the usual Cathedral chime, then go into the program.

SUGGESTED SONG PROGRAM

(May be done with the words or just the tone of the note.)

"Good King Wenceslas."

"Deck the Halls."

"Jingle Bells."

A SERVICE FOR THE HANGING OF THE GREENS

BY PAUL NAGY, JR.

The decorating of the church auditorium, the chancel, and the Sunday School rooms is an important part of the Christmas preparations. It should be given careful and considerable thought and planning. Too frequently, all the labor falls on the shoulders of a few, year after year. Care must be taken, furthermore, to have the decorations in good artistic taste. There should be a purpose in all of it. The congregation as a whole has very little to do with all this, except to enjoy (and criticize) the efforts of the few. There are always those who "would have done it differently," but they are conspicuously absent when the work is being done. In order, therefore, that the decorating of the church be made more significant, the following plan is suggested as it evolved from the writer's experience.

In the first place, a change of terminology is necessary. Forget about "decorating" the church. Call it, instead, THE HANGING OF THE GREENS. Second, let the Pastor's Cabinet appoint a Committee to plan the placing and kind of trimmings, trees, and so on. A blue-print would be handy and would later eliminate a lot of unnecessary worry and fuss. Third, this Committee would ask each of the classes and/or organizations to be responsible for some one thing. One group may be responsible for the purchase or the cutting of the trees. Another may organize a laurel gathering party, and spend an evening making strings of laurel. One group may be asked to check carefully all lighting equipment, tree bulbs, etc., and fuses. One class may

be asked to check over the tree trimmings, repair some, discard others, and purchase new ones where necessary. Or a better plan is to ask the minister to invite THE CONGREGATION to do the actual work under the supervision of the Committee. In any event, make the affair a COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE!

In the fourth place, set the date for the decorating. Start as early in the evening as possible. As soon as a few people come in, give them something to do. Do not let them stand around waiting for something to happen; otherwise, they will lose interest and go home disappointed.

This may be as good a time as any for the various classes to decorate their own rooms. For example, the children may put up their crèches, trim their own little trees, and the like. They may have made some red, blue, green, and gold stars that they want to hang up. The important thing is to get the young and old of the congregation interested.

Try to have all of this done by the second Sunday in December. Usually the trouble is that the greens *et al.* get up too late and come down too early. Remember, the people will be getting to services only on Sunday (and some only to one service, at that).

WHERE TO HANG THE GREENS?

This is a question that must be decided by the local group, inasmuch as the writer is not acquainted with traditions, customs, taboos, and so on all over the country. He does suggest the following which may be adapted to your own circumstances.

OUTSIDE

Dioramas

1. Some scenes from the Nativity cut out of heavy cardboard or plywood, carefully colored, boxed,

and lighted. For example, there may be the coming of the Wise Men. The box may be about three feet high, five to six feet wide, and about six to nine inches deep. The figures may be in the foreground, looking toward Bethlehem, guided by the Star. All the lighting should be behind the figures. The Star may be cut out and have its own special light.

The appearance of the Angels to the Shepherds may be another scene. Just be sure that you use a waterproof shellac over the paint. Flank this diorama with graduated candles.

2. The doorway into the church. Place graduated candles on the steps, the tallest candle on the top step. Twine laurel around the candles and up around a *Madonna and Child* cut-out which is above the door with an amber spot thrown on the picture.

INSIDE

1. The vestibule will make a fine art gallery. Select from magazines or purchase from your denominational headquarters, pictures that deal with the Christmas Story. One year you may display a series of *Madonnas*. Another year try a different subject. Arrange the pictures artistically, not crowding too much. You might include a poem or two, a few other leading stories (brief) and the like for the sake of those who just might linger long enough in the vestibule to meditate.
2. The auditorium. The temptation might be to overdo it. If your chancel has stained glass windows, or a reredos, you might not want to put anything else into it. If you have a plain chancel, however, or just a pulpit platform, you might make a back drop of some soft blue material and fill it with dozens of gold and silver stars that

may be pasted on this material. In the center, over the Altar, one of your artist members or friends may be prevailed upon to prepare a special painting of the *Madonna and Child*. On either side of the Altar, perhaps in the very corners, put a set of three blue candles, from the top of which drips the simulated tallow. Use only low wattage, white "candle" bulbs.

Overhead, if there is a source for the electricity, hang a large twelve-pointed glass star, and if you care to, you may place a slender cedar tree on each side of the outside frame of the chancel. If you use lights on these trees, be sure they are of one color, not the myriad colors we use in our homes, as a rule.

As a variant for the *Madonna and Child* in the chancel wall, you might want to cut out large figures in three groups. Way up on the wall, in the center, the first group would be Joseph, Mary, and the Child. In the left-hand corner (as you face the chancel), a group of Shepherds looking up at the Nativity. In the right-hand corner, the three Magi. All of these groups are lighted from behind, giving an illusion of depth. Against the blue back drop this really makes an attractive picturization of the main elements of the Gospel Narrative.

A large Christmas Tree complete with trimmings and lights may be placed in the rear of the auditorium, or in the main Sunday School room.

After all the decorations have been placed, refreshments may be served to the group.

THE SERVICE OF DEDICATION

If the project has been carefully planned and there has been a large number of participants, all this work

can be completed in one evening. When it is done, if it is not too late, there ought to be a brief worship service to dedicate your labors and their fruits to their designed purpose. The refreshments ought to be served *after* this brief service.

PRELUDE

CAROL: "*O Come, All Ye Faithful*"

A STORY: "How We Got Our Christmas Greens"

(Select just a few of the traditional Greens and tell their origin. Magazines at this time of the year contain many stories like this.)

CAROL: "*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*"

A BRIEF CHRISTMAS STORY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION BY THE MINISTER

(Now darken the auditorium, turn on only those lights that illuminate the greens.)

SILENT PERIOD

CAROL: "*Silent Night*"—hummed by the group

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

ANOTHER PLAN

For various reasons the group might want to omit the brief service of dedication following the HANGING OF THE GREENS so that the service would be held on the first Sunday evening after the decorating. The purpose is to show the members not merely the trimmings, but also their meaning, and the part they will play in the coming Christmas celebrations.

PRELUDE: Christmas Medleys

HYMN: "*O Little Town of Bethlehem*"

CALL TO WORSHIP:

"Come ye that love the Lord.

Enter into His house with praise.
 Let us worship Him in Spirit
 and in Truth,
 For the Lord loveth such."

HYMN: "*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*"

HOW WE GOT OUR CHRISTMAS GREENS AND CUSTOMS

1. The Christmas Tree
2. The Laurel, Holly, Mistletoe
3. The Christmas Carols

HYMN: "*Calm on the Listening Ear of Night*"

WHO WAS ST. NICHOLAS?—

Written and presented by some member of the
 Young People's Department.

CAROL: "*Jolly Old Saint Nicholas*"

(Sung by the children)

HOW THE CRECHE ORIGINATED

(This may be told as a story, or some class may
 prepare a brief dramatization.)

CAROLS REQUESTED BY THE CONGREGATION

WORSHIP THROUGH THE OFFERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE LIGHTING OF THE TREES, STARS, AND OTHER IL-
 LUMINATED OBJECTS

(As the congregation sits in the darkened audi-
 torium, a soloist sings the first stanza of "*Silent
 Night*" and the people hum another stanza.)

THE PRAYER OF DEDICATION BY THE MINISTER

THE CLOSING HYMN: "*As with Gladness Men of Old*"

THE BENEDICTION

NOTE: While this may become an annual event, the

same items of interest need not be repeated
CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS IN OTHER
LANDS would be a fascinating alternative.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

I. STORIES

“*Is There a Santa Claus?*”—little Virginia’s famous letter and the answer she received from the publisher

“*The Pilgrims’ First Christmas*”—Josephine Pittman

“*The First Christmas Tree*”—Henry Van Dyke

“*The Gift*”—David Burrell

“*No Room at the Inn*”—Minor Bryant

“*A Christmas Carol*”—Charles Dickens

“*The Other Wise Man*”—Henry Van Dyke

Cf. also “*The Christmas Annual*” published each year by the Augsburg Publishing Company, Minneapolis, Minn., for additional stories and poems, and some less frequently used carols.

II. MUSIC

“*Christmas Carols*,” published gratis by the John Hancock Life Insurance Company

“*The Christmas Caroler’s Book*”—Hall and McCreary Company

“*Christmas Carols for Community Singing*”—Hall-Mack Company

“*Stories of Hymns We Love*”—C. M. Rudin

“*Famous Hymns*”—Elizabeth H. Bonsall

Secure the catalogs of the various Record people for additional music and dramatizations.

III. OTHER HELPS

“*Uncle Toby’s Christmas Book*”—Harper’s

“*The Elementary Magazine*”

“*The International Journal of Religious Education*”

Denominational Bulletins

All Christmas issues of magazines. Save these and you will have a veritable storehouse of poetry, stories, decorations, etc.

“*Carols—Their Origin, Music and Connection with Mystery-plays*”—William J. Phillips

EPIPHANY

BY PAUL NAGY, JR.

"A light to lighten the Gentiles"

This is a fixed festival of the Church Year, falling on January 6. It commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Several other names are given to this day, such as Twelfth-tide and Twelfth-day, of which the evening is Twelfth-night.

The general meaning of Epiphany is the outpouring of light as symbolized in the coming of the Magi to the Christ-Child. The Church has logically emphasized the symbol of LIGHT in this missionary-consciousness. Consequently, the use of candles is most appropriate for the service of worship. There is something thrilling, dramatic, and even awe-inspiring about the service in which the flickering candles cast their unsteady glow around them. People are visibly impressed, brought into closer fellowship with one another.

Simply distributing candles to the congregation and lighting them at a certain time does not create worship, however. The entire service must be prepared with great care. Scripture passages that refer to light and to Jesus as the Light of the World; poems, hymns, and anthems, all must be selected wisely.

For Epiphany the most beautiful service available is the very ancient Greek FEAST OF LIGHTS. Dr. P. E. Osgood, in whose book * this service is to be found, says that the celebration of the Epiphany by the Eastern Church long antedates the celebration of Christmas by the Western Church. The theme of the service which

* *"Old Time Church Drama Adapted"*—P. E. Osgood.

he has adapted to modern usage is the communication of the light of the Christ-Candle to a churchful of candles. Represented by candles and also persons are the Twelve Apostles, the Historic Ministry, and the Magi. The service is annotated with copious notes for its presentation. Congregations wishing to start their Missionary Emphasis with real dramatic force and tempo might well consider the FEAST OF LIGHTS. (Another version is "*The Feast of Lights*" by B. W. Bonell.)

THE COMING OF THE WISE MEN

"Behold, there came Wise Men from the East"

Frequently we make the mistake of running the story of the Magi on the heels of the Nativity, not realizing that considerable time passed between the birth of Jesus and the appearance of the Wise Men. It would be well for us to make more of those three grand, mysterious personages who left their comfortable homes in the East to find a new-born King by following a Star. That required faith, moral stamina, and real physical fortitude.

Plays about these Persian sages are none too numerous, but those available are challenging for production. These plays should not, however, be presented as isolated productions. They should definitely be the climax to a well-planned worship service, utilizing the hymns of Epiphany which the average church uses so rarely. The service might close on a note of personal consecration and our dedication to the further spreading of the Light. Carefully done, and not too drawn out, a brief candle-lighting service would be an appropriate conclusion to such a dramatic celebration of Epiphany.

Plays to choose from:

"And Myrrh"—D. C. Wilson

"Alien Star"—Frances and Rockwell Smith

- “*The Fragrance of Myrrh*”—M. H. Bowles
 “*The Wise Men at the Well*”—E. W. Bates
 “*The Message of the Magi*”—M. P. Jones
 “*Three Wise Men*”—D. C. Allan
 “*The Lost Star*”—D. C. Wilson
 “*There Is Room in the Inn*”—A. H. Yinger
 “*It Was Written in the Star*”—E. P. Jones

THE MISSIONARY ANGLE

“*Go ye therefore and preach the Gospel*”

The FEAST OF EPIPHANY begins the Church's emphasis on MISSIONS. A number of missionary plays are available for presentation during this period. The local Woman's Missionary Society could present one of these plays as their contribution to the program:

- “*The Burden Bearers*”—D. C. Wilson
 “*Joash*”—L. D. George
 “*The Sword that Divides*”—L. Wilson
 “*Ba Thane*”—E. A. Baldwin
 “*The Captains and the Kings*”—C. Pollock
 “*Chinese Gold*”—E. Field
 “*Conversion*”—E. C. Averill
 “*The Doctor Decides*”—F. Eastman
 “*The Friendly Kingdom*”—D. C. Wilson
 “*A Grain of Wheat*”—D. C. Wilson
 “*The Lost Church*”—D. C. Wilson
 “*Omar*”—E. Field
 “*Tardy April*”—L. Wilson
 “*World Without End*”—A. F. Johnson

TWELFTH NIGHT

The secular observance of this day in our own country is somewhat sporadic and scattered. There is an old superstition (or legend) that bad luck will enter a

home unless the Christmas decorations, i. e., the trees and other greens, are burned on the twelfth night after December 25.

A small community could make a real festival of this Twelfth-night legend. Let all the Christmas trees, mistletoe, holly, laurel, and the like be collected and brought to the Square or some other convenient place. There, amidst singing of carols and other happy songs, with some stories about the good these decorations have done, let the burgess or some other official light the bonfire.

After this celebration, the townspeople should go to the Town Hall to be entertained by plays that deal with Twelfth Night. The inevitable coffee and doughnuts should not be omitted. Plays available for this occasion are "*Twelfth Night Festivities*" by E. L. Knox; "*Twelfth Night at Moulderby*" by Knevels and Van Doren; "*Bean and 'Has-Been'*" by Essex Dane.

JEANNE D'ARC

January 6 marks the birth date of that renowned Maid of France. Because of what she represents in world history, there ought to be some commemoration of her deeds and death. Several plays are suggested here for your consideration.

- "*Joan the Maid*"—H. Ould.
- "*Jeanne d'Arc*"—E. G. Sterne
- "*The Vision at the Inn*"—J. Buchan
- "*Jeanne d'Arc*"—M. M. Grimes
- "*Saint Joan*"—G. B. Shaw
- "*Jeanne d'Arc*"—P. MacKaye
- "*In the Forest of Domremy*"—V. R. Sutton
- "*Maid of France*"—H. Brighthouse

A WATCH NIGHT SERVICE OF WORSHIP

BY PAUL NAGY, JR.

To invest the ringing in of the New Year with a sacredness and dignity, many congregations gather in the Sanctuary for an hour's service on the last day of the year. The purpose of this worship is retrospection and propection, and its underlying theme is our human dependence upon the goodness of a Heavenly Father and an expression of thankfulness to Him.

In order to give the evening an aspect of fun and fellowship, a brief entertainment (about an hour and a half long) may be presented by some organizations in the social room. During this period let fun and frolic be the watchword. Any number of recitations, humorous dramatic sketches, home talent music, and group singing can be utilized.

During the last half hour the Ladies' Aid may serve coffee, tea, and doughnuts (or left-over Christmas cookies).

By eleven o'clock the members of the congregation are in a darkened church for the worship. The only light is shed by the flickering candles on the window-sills and, of course, on the Altar. During this time the organist plays her Prelude and the choir marches in silent procession to the choir loft. Then the auditorium lights are turned on and the congregation, standing, sings "*Thou Who Roll'st the Year Around*" (Tune: *Maidstone*). After which the minister reads the following poem:

*“ A Flower unblown; a Book unread,
A Tree with fruit unharvested;
A Path untrod; a House whose rooms
Lack yet the heart’s divine perfumes:
A Landscape whose wide border lies
In silent shade ’neath silent skies:
A wondrous Fountain yet unsealed:
A casket with its gifts concealed—
This is the Year that for you waits
Beyond tomorrow’s mystic gates.”*

The congregation then sings “ *Softly the Silent Night* ” (Tune: *St. Edmund*). This is followed by the Scripture Lesson which may be *Hebrews II* or *James I*, or some other appropriate passage. Then will follow, as the organist plays softly, the Pastoral Prayer:

“ O great Eternal, our thankful hearts bow to Thee on this last day of our year. We are mindful of the many things Thou hast done for us. Thou hast showered upon us countless gifts which have made us happy. The seasons have come and gone in the regularity with which Thou didst plan them even before the mountains were brought forth. Likewise, Thou didst visit us with afflictions and trials because of which we are better and stronger. In our weaker moments Thou wast our Shepherd. Thy rod and staff comforted us. Thou hast always been an ever present help and consolation. Thou hast been our Eternal source of every joy. Thy name be praised in Heaven and upon earth!

“ We pray Thee now to help us profit by the mistakes as well as the victories of the year which is passing. May we be full-bodied, full-minded, and full-spirited men and women. May we always acknowledge Thee as the One from Whom have come all the good and rich things of life. We are so apt to praise ourselves and to neglect Thee. May we now be able to give proper acknowledgment as we see the Old Year leaving us.

“We leave entirely in Thy hands the secrets of the New Year. Our hope is cast on Thee. We know that if Thou will accompany us on this unknown and untraveled journey, nothing shall happen to us. Be Thou our Guide; our Help as in ages past. Help us, Thy children, to learn how to live together in better understanding; in peace and harmony. May the people of the world understand the teachings of Jesus Christ and learn to apply them to their daily life. Let wars throughout the world cease. Send Thy Spirit upon all men in every race and clime, that the whole earth may be filled with a knowledge of Thee even as the earth is covered by the sea.

“Bless our efforts of the past, and encourage our endeavors in the future. Accept our humble contributions to the establishment and advancement of Thy Kingdom here upon earth.” (*Choral Amen.*)

Then while the offering is being received, the congregation will sing “*All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*” (Tune: *Coronation*). The minister will dedicate the offering with a suitable prayer.

This may be followed by a quiet meditation with organ accompaniment using such poems as “*Ring Out the Old, Ring in the New*”—Tennyson; “*The Last Days*”—Susan Coolidge. Immediately preceding the sermon the choir will sing “*Standing at the Portal*” (Tune: *St. Alban*).

Now the lights are extinguished and the minister may use as the theme of his meditation “*Thoughts at the Portal.*” Or he may use these few moments to lead his flock in a backward look at their private life, their family life, their life in the community, in the church, in the world—guiding them to realize where they have fallen short of practising the ideals of Jesus in their human relationships and bringing them to a new contract between themselves and God that they will honestly endeavor in the year ahead to improve themselves. During

this time the organ plays very softly and the minister's tone is not one of preachment, but rather of intimate conversation. Between these thoughts he allows for moments of total silence that his people may be alone with themselves.

Timing himself accurately at eleven-fifty the minister will distribute the candles to the ushers who come forward on a prearranged signal. The ushers then give each member a candle. After every member has received his candle the minister explains how they are to be used, and he will point out the dangers involved. The congregation then stands in a large circle around the auditorium with their candles. As the bells in the community ring out TWELVE the congregation bows for a moment of silent, prayerful meditation. The minister will go to the *Master Candle* which has been placed in back of the Cross and there receive his light. He comes down to the floor of the church, and either his wife or the oldest member of the congregation receives his or her light from the minister's candle. This act is repeated by every member in the circle until every candle is lighted (each person having received his light from his neighbor). As this flaming *Circle of Fellowship* is created, the minister says these words:

"As all light comes from Jesus, the Light of the world, so you and I receive our light from Him, and pass it to our neighbor. May it dispel the darkness and mystery that lie ahead of us in the coming year. May our paths be illumed showing us only the right road and warning us of any dangers that may lie ahead. Greeting the New Year with brightness, may it be cheerfully, happily, and prosperously illuminated. God grant it!"

As part of this ritual, after all the candles are lighted, the minister and the members of his congregation repeat the following pledge:

*“ We pledge ourselves
To follow through the coming year
The Light which God gives us:
The Light of Truth, wherever it may lead;
The Light of Freedom, revealing new opportunities for
individual development and social service;
The Light of Faith, opening new visions of the better
world to be;
The Light of Love, daily binding brother to brother and
man to God in ever closer bonds of friendship and
affection.
Guided by this light,
We shall go forward to the work of another year with
steadfastness and confidence.”*

The service closes with the singing of the hymn
“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”—(Tune: *Dennis*).
The minister then pronounces the Aaronic Benediction.

With his wife, the minister then greets each individual
in the circle. There has been a very sacred atmosphere
in this service. In the beautiful growth of light in the
Circle of Fellowship, we are brought closer to one an-
other as one might be in a service of Holy Communion.

This suggested service may be varied from year to
year and adapted to the local needs and circumstances.
Once begun, however, the congregation will always look
forward to the *Christian* way of greeting the New Year.

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