

## January.



THE very name of the month suggests the intensity of cold. Winter has established its reign; the sharp frosts have penetrated to the depths of the earth; every stream is locked; every flower is buried; every bird's song is hushed; and if in the bare forest the woodpeckers and nut-hatches still linger, we hear only a short, quick call, which, repeated at short intervals, sounds like the tones of a dialogue, but there is no singing. In sheltered places and near the farm-houses, we often may see a solitary robin, or a company of chickadees, helping themselves to the supplies provided for the fowls, or flying merrily about the kitchen door in search of a few crumbs. With the snow which, if it falls at all, is usually most abundant at this season, comes a troop of snow-birds, with their graceful wheeling flight, swinging upon the swirling drifts of the storm, as though it were a delight to them to be a part of it.

It is worth while for any one living in the country, and loving snow-birds, to plant a few sunflowers in the fence corners, to afford them a feast in the deep snow when everything is covered and beyond their reach. The tall plant holds up its sturdy head against the northern blasts, and its rich oily seeds are a great favorite with all winter birds. I have seen a cluster of these weather-beaten stalks covered with a whole flock of the plump little creatures, in all kinds of attitudes, chattering with delight at their rich "find." In the city, the sparrows are the object of unlimited charity, and in the morning, after a heavy snow fall, one cannot go many steps without seeing comfortable breakfast parties within the area rails, enjoying a bountiful meal spread for them upon the white cover nature has provided. It would be well if the poor could be fed as bountifully and with as little trouble, but mid-winter brings out in sharp relief the dramatic contrasts between poverty and wealth; and, while the rich are preparing their gayest entertainments and engaging in a round of pleasure, the poor are shrinking into the shadow of the season, appalled at the double conflict with cold and hunger. It is now that the gentle charities shine most brightly, and ministry of Christian love is most active.

In the great city there is enough to do, for want sits by many a cold hearthstone, and children wander helpless and homeless in the chill streets. If society rests content with its gay life of dissipation, and lets the winters come and go, without putting out its hand to help, save to bestow a thoughtless alms, darker scenes will come, and beggary—the beggary of Italy, and all the old civilizations—will disfigure our shores, and combining with ignorance and vice, form a league, which will threaten the moral health of the nation. The remedy must come from a wiser and better considered system of relief, and men must learn the lesson that the hard season teaches to all that will learn, that only in ceaseless in-

dustry and wise forethought, is there defense against want and misery.

The New Year; what heart does not thrill with some dawning hope at the sound of the New Year's bells? Life is a great mystery, and in its obscure future lies the secret of its supreme interest, its ceaseless charm. Every year brings its disappointments, and lays low many a cherished idol; but we look forward still to the unknown hieroglyph on the scroll of the future with unflinching gaze, and fresh anticipations of delight.

The cry of the heart is for life, life, life,—and every year presents a fresh draft to the thirsting lips, and we are sure, that if to many it be bitter, it is always true, that to many more it will be sweet. It lies with us all to make the sum of wretchedness ever less, and the sum of human happiness constantly increasing.

The year that is past has been one of national trial and national calamity, and never before in the history of our country have we so rejoiced to welcome the frost, and looked forward to the advent of winter as to the signal of deliverance. Among our stricken ones, the year opens amid lingering shadows; many homes are desolate, many hearts are broken, but the pestilence is stayed, and the Destroyer is laid low.

Slowly but surely light and joy shall return, and that which has been shall be again, and our own dear land, once distracted and torn by the fury of war, shall be bound in indissoluble union by the ministry of suffering.

Let us welcome the New Year with thankfulness, and look to the splendid possibilities that lie before, with hope that they shall be more than fulfilled in the coming years, crowned with abundance, prosperity, and peace.

## The New Year.

BY MARIE MERRICK.

AS from the Old Year's grave we turn away,  
With sad reluctant feet,  
A somber form, all clad in misty gray,  
Our yearning gaze doth meet:

LIKE some gray nun just from the cloister's pale,  
We see it standing there;  
Fain would our glances pierce beneath the veil,  
To know if she be fair.

FROM Time's vast cloister cometh this one now,  
Unto the world that waits,  
The multitudes, that longing, hungering, bow  
Without the Heavenly Gates.

AND she will stand amid the waiting throng,  
Dealing to each his dole,  
Until the shadows of her day grow long,  
And cruelly, fiercely roll

DECEMBER'S winds through leafless, shivering trees,  
While cloud-looms swiftly weave  
Snow-garments, the poor, naked earth to please,  
Her bareness to relieve.

AND then, when dying we shall see this year,  
And view unveiled her face,  
Will there be one who need not shed a tear,  
O'er scars he would efface?

UNSIGHTLY scars which he, himself, hath wrought  
With evil's chisel keen;  
Scars which shall cause to rise the bitter thought  
Of all that might have been,

WHICH would upon the dead year's brow have cast  
A glow of peace serene;  
That peace which oft—as knowing sorrow past—  
Is on dead faces seen.

ALAS! the lesson comes so oft too late,  
That we who have a share,  
Each one, in carving out his earthly fate,  
Might make our years all fair.

## New Year in Japan.

BY LYDIA M. MILLARD.



HERE are a great many beautiful things to be seen in our store windows during the holidays, but I should like very much to walk with some of my young friends through the streets of Japan, on the 6th of February, the day before their New-Year, which comes a little later than ours. Everything is being cleaned up and brightened, from the slate-colored tiles of the low roofs, and the gallery in the upper story looking out upon the street, to the matting covering the lower floor. The mats are made white as snow, with rice powder. The beautiful screens between the walls of the rooms are taken down, and all the beautiful birds, trees, and flowers, painted on their gold ground, are brightened and look like new. If you walk near the bridge of Niphon, the heart of the city, you'll see the sidewalks almost covered with matting, screens, bronze, and porcelain, which are to be cleaned and put back in their places again. In the houses of the rich, you'll see coolies or porters putting everything in order. They are full of fun, tumbling down stairs, stumbling over footstools, or tossing one of their lazy companions up in a blanket.

Over some of the doors, you'll see pine or bamboo trees, bound together at the top with rice-straw garlands, and adorned with oranges and gilded paper. Long straw bands, inwoven with fir branches and ferns, ornament the roofs, and walls, and balconies. The temples and fountains and ships are adorned in the same way with firs and ferns. The streets are crowded with country and city people. The peasant's horses are almost weighed down with bamboo and fir twigs. Everybody carries an umbrella, and the men and women carry their baggage on the back of their neck, wrapped in oil paper. Your ears are almost deafened with the noise of little trumpets, tambourines, and whistles, little flageolets and Dan's pipes. Every storekeeper wants to sell as many as he can; so he whistles and blows his trumpets, and strikes his tambourines, and makes all the little bells jingle as long and as hard as he can. The children try them too, and tease their mothers to buy some of the curious little bears and monkeys,