



CHRISTMAS CARD POETS

BY W. J. WINTLE.

Illustrated by Portraits and special Autographs.



EVERY lover of the "Bab Ballads" will remember the sorrows of Ferdinando and Elvira, how in the midst of pulling crackers at Christmas-tide the lady's brow became clouded over with anxious thought, and presently her pent-up feelings found relief in an outburst of tears. The gallant Ferdinando was all anxiety, and in his eagerness to assuage the sorrows of his mistress, offered to go in search of the North Pole or explore the depths of Vesuvius, if such devotion could afford her any relief.

"But," she said, "It isn't polar bears or hot volcanic grottoes, Only find out who it is that writes those lovely cracker mottoes."

Ferdinando set out upon a veritable voyage of discovery. He sought high and low, but failed to find the scent. Poets and "literary gents" froze him with scorn and contempt when he inquired if they knew aught about it, and at last he gave way to despair. Then it was that he met with a gentle pieman,

who admitted that in the intervals of making patties and polishing the silver he wrote "those lovely cracker verses."

We have been upon similar discovery bent, though we have not found a pieman amongst the poets. When the editor blandly suggested that a good deal of leisure time might be usefully occupied in finding out the writers of Christmas card verses, we first pulled a long face, then put on an air of well-assumed assurance, and sought help at the hands of two of the principal card manufacturers.

Our first call was at the establishment of Messrs. Raphael Tuck & Sons in Coleman Street, where the courteous director, Mr. Adolf Tuck, was good enough to talk about his experiences.

"We get very little usable verse from outsiders," he began; "nearly all our verse is written for us by our regular contributors, such as Miss Burnside and Mr. Cowan. Of course we get any quantity sent in, every post brings heaps of it, and," with a sigh, "we read it all. But very little is of any use."

"Then, I suppose, your waste-paper basket gets well filled?"

"Oh, no; not at all: we send it all back to the writers. You see we have no means of announcing that 'The Editor will not be responsible for the return of rejected contributions,' so it all has to go back again. What are the chief faults? Well, of course, much of it is mere nonsense, not poetry at all, written by persons who evidently know nothing whatever about verse-writing. But apart from mere faults of metre or rhyme, a great deal of it is far too sentimental and gushing. We often receive verses expressing sentiments which would only be appropriate in the case of an engaged couple, or of very near relatives. Now a Christmas card should be of such a character that any person may fitly send it to any other person, so that verses addressed to a mother, or to a lover, are quite inappropriate. Then a large proportion of the verse sent in is far too religious, and would not express the feelings of the general public. Many of the verses express the hope that the recipient may have a happy hereafter! Could anything be in worse taste than to remind a person of his latter end on a Christmas card?"

"What, then, are the qualities specially needed for a Christmas card verse, Mr. Tuck?"

"Well, in the first place, it should not be too poetical. By that I mean it should not be involved, or obscure in its allusions. We need verses that can be read at a glance and understood at the same time. They should read smoothly and rhyme correctly. Each should contain a simple appropriate sentiment of a friendly character. But the word 'friend' should be strictly tabooed. Then it is essential that they should be quite general in character. As I have already said, any sentiment which would only apply to special circumstances or relationships, would be fatal to the success of a card. The sentiment should not be especially Christmassy. We find practically no demand for the old-fashioned card, with a robin and a spray of holly. The favourite designs at the present day have no special reference to the season, and it goes without saying that the verse should agree with the design."

"You would hardly make much use of quotations from the poets then?"

"We do to a certain extent, but not very largely. Of course Shakspeare heads the list. You will be interested to know that about two years before Lord Tennyson's death I offered him a thousand guineas if he

would write us eight Christmas card verses. He sent me a polite refusal, though I have reason to know that he did not resent the proposal. Talking of Tennyson reminds me that soon after the laureateship became vacant, I received a letter from a would-be poet in Edinburgh, enclosing yards of doggerel, and a photograph showing him to be a gentleman of the long-haired, wild-eyed variety. He explained in his letter that his friends so warmly admired his poetry that he had been encouraged to apply for the laureateship. Of course I wrote back a very polite letter, expressing the hope that he would get it! I may add that the bulk of our verses are written to order by our regular contributors. Curiously enough, our comic poet is a clergyman, the rector of an important English parish. No, you must not ask me his name. His verses are never signed, and he writes for us on the distinct understanding that his identity shall not be revealed."

"And now, Mr. Tuck, let me trouble you with only one more question. What is the latest step in the evolution of the Christmas card?"

"General beauty, undoubtedly. Considerations of season count for very little. Out of 1250 sets of cards we have only about a dozen that are Christmassy, and these sell the worst. Our special feature for the coming Christmas is a very chaste arrangement of flowers upon lace work, which I fancy will become popular. Of course, we have to work a long time in advance. The cards for the present season were completed last April, and we are now well on the way with those for 1897. I attribute all our success to the fact that each designer's work is executed at a factory specially selected for the purpose. We thus employ thirty factories in various countries, but for black and white work England is still supreme."

We next sought help from Mr. W. Macdonald Mackay, the manager of the card department of Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co.'s establishment at the Royal Ulster Works, Belfast.

"Of all writers of Christmas card verse," he observed, "the late Frances Ridley Havergal is still the most popular. For many years she wrote verses exclusively for our firm. None of her poems have touched the hearts of the people more than the familiar 'Bells across the Snow,' and of many celebrated poems in which the music of bells is brought back to our ears through the instrumentality of felicitous verses, I venture to think that none have struck

happier or more resonant notes. The late Mrs. C. F. Alexander's few Christmas poems were also great favourites."

"You think, then, that religious verses still take with the public?"

"Most certainly that is the case in our experience, though I am aware that some firms do not find it so. But with us cards bearing verses of religious character have always proved to be the most popular, selling better even than the humorous ones. They are always the favourites. After all, the quantity of modern Christmas verse is by no means an extensive one. Indeed, the majority of our cards bear only the customary greeting, occasionally relieved with a quotation from Shakspeare, Burns, or Browning. We have issued some few cards each year bearing specially written poems by Sarah Doudney, the late Rev. J. R. Macduff, F. E. Weatherley, Eliza Keary, and others. Occasionally the artist who designed the cards wrote verses for them, as in the case of Walter Crane's well-known designs. The couplets were written by him."

"And what about the contributions of outsiders?"

"Do not mention it! Hundreds of verses are submitted to the firm during the year, all more or less of a very orthodox nature, and the majority of them quite unsuitable for publication."

"I understand that your firm has been recently endeavouring to raise the tone of Christmas card verses?"

"Yes, that is so. The want of Christmas verse of real merit was forcibly impressed on me some years ago when preparing mottoes and arranging verses for the season's cards. The idea of a series of literary cards arose in my mind, and, although time did not permit of an extensive series, we communicated with the best-known poets of the day, asking them to write us a poem or sonnet for the series. The number who favoured the idea was not large, but poems were secured from Richard Le Gallienne, Norman Gale, 'E. Nesbit,' and Mrs. C. F. Alexander, to which we added the carol by Canon Farrar and the well-known hymn by Sears. These were illustrated by a young South Kensington artist, Mr. F. Appleyard. The series was a great success, and was an attempt to raise the standard of paste-board verse. Last Christmas we arranged a competition to extend the series, and the first prize was awarded to 'Evan Keane,' whose verses were favourably noticed in the WINDSOR MAGAZINE for June. Mr. Keane's

poem was considered a notable exception to the ordinary verse submitted to the firm, and since the competition he has written a good deal of Christmas verse for future use. This season we have secured poems from Mrs. Meynell, Mrs. Dollie Radford, and the use of Sir Lewis Morris's 'Christmas Carol.' I may add that Lord Tennyson's 'Christmas Bells,' and 'Ring out, wild bells,' were used many years ago on Christmas cards, by special arrangement with the late laureate, and have been immensely popular whenever issued."

"I notice that you include several of the minor poets among your contributors, Mr. Mackay."

"That is so, and I think the fact has its significance. According to the booksellers poetry is a drug in the market. Here then is a chance for our modern poets to exercise their gift of song. Their verses, through the medium of the Christmas card, would make their name and work more popular and widely known, and would help to introduce them to the general public. I hope that two of our contributors, for example, May Bateman and 'Evan Keane,' will be heard more of in the future. The latter may turn out another Byron, although a note of sadness is dominant in a lot of his work which has come under my notice."

"Do you find that Christmas cards are still largely used by the public?"

"Most certainly we do. Christmas cards have never been so popular as they are at the present time. The number of publishers is greater than ever, the majority of them showing productions more or less of German origin. Our own firm have this year a larger collection of cards than they ever had since they began to issue them in 1866."

Mr. Mackay was good enough to show us the principal series of cards for the coming season—a bewildering multitude of chaste designs, harmonious colouring and tuneful verse. By the courtesy of Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co. we are enabled to insert Miss Havergal's popular verses.

BELLS ACROSS THE SNOW.

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
Is it really come again?
With its memories and greetings,
With its joy and with its pain.
There's a minor in the carol,
And a shadow in the light,
And a spray of cypress twining
With the holly wreath to-night
And the hush is never broken
By laughter light and low,
As we listen in the starlight
To the "bells across the snow."

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
 'Tis not so very long
 Since other voices blended
 With the carol and the song
 If we could but hear them singing
 As they are singing now,
 If we could but see the radiance
 Of the crown on each dear brow;
 There would be no sigh to smother,
 No hidden tear to flow,
 As we listen in the starlight
 To the "bells across the snow."

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
 This never more can be;
 We cannot bring again the days
 Of our unshadowed glee.
 But Christmas, happy Christmas,
 Sweet herald of good will,
 With holy songs of glory
 Brings holy gladness still.
 For peace and hope may brighten,
 And patient love may glow,
 As we listen in the starlight
 To the "bells across the snow."

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL.

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

Amongst writers of Christmas card verse Miss Burnside stands in the foremost rank. Of Scottish origin, she was born at Bromley Hall, Middlesex, and is first cousin to Miss Charlotte Murray, the well-known writer of religious poetry. From a very early age she has written verses, her first volume of poems appearing in 1864. For many years she has been an untiring literary worker—tales, articles and poems without number having been produced month by month. The sweetness of her verse receives an added pathos from the fact that in childhood she permanently lost her hearing and has lived her life in an absolutely silent world. She was good enough to give us an interview at the house of Miss Rosa Nouchette Carey, the novelist, with whom she has lived and worked for the last twenty years.

"How did you first discover your gift of song?" we asked, with the aid of paper and pencil.

"Well it came about in this way. When I was twelve years old I became deaf after

an attack of scarlet fever. Up to that time I was passionately fond of music, and when I could no longer hear the notes I used to love, all the music in me seemed to turn to song and I began to write verses. My first published verses were sent to Messrs. Marcus Ward, and were so severely handled by the reviewers that it spurred me on to the determination that I would write something



From a photo by

[Poole, Putney.

MISS H. M. BURNSIDE.

worthy of their approval. I really think that I owe a great deal to my critics for the rough things they used to say about me."

"I suppose that your published verses must now amount to a very great number?"

"Yes, I have written card verses for upwards of twenty years, averaging perhaps about 400 verses in the year, inclusive of Christmas,

*A merry Christmas, take again
 The old, old wish from me,
 May it lead in a joyous train
 Of happy years to be.*

Helen Marion Burnside

A CHRISTMAS VERSE BY MISS BURNSIDE.

New Year, Easter, birthday and valentine verses. In addition to the greater part of Messrs. Raphael Tuck & Sons' work I write verses for all the leading fine art publishers. But I am anxious not to be known as a writer of card verses merely, as this idea has been very injurious to me. I work hard all the year round, writing poems for booklets and calendars, daily text verses, songs, stories and magazine articles. I have just completed collecting and arranging a selection of my 'Poems and Lyrics' for publication in book form. You know, I suppose, that I used to be literary editor to Messrs. Tuck?"

"Yes, and I hope you will favour our readers with some of your experiences there."

"While I was with Messrs. Tuck many thousands of verses and poems used to pass through my hands every year. The greater part of the mornings was occupied in reading mss. of this kind. Much of it was a real pleasure to read—such as would be sent in by clergymen, university men, and the minor poets. But these were in most cases totally unsuitable for the purpose. They were mostly too scholarly or too religious, whilst others were too high flown or sentimental. Of course one received a good deal which it was *not* a pleasure to read. Some of it was the silliest drivel imaginable. Many people seem to think they can write Christmas card verses."

"Can you give me an example how not to do it?"

"I only kept copies of a very few specimens, and some of these I have quoted in my reminiscences, which appear in the forthcoming Christmas number of *Hearth and Home*, but here is one that you may publish:—

Hurrah! for at Christmas everybody
Should eat and drink and merry make,
And so I wish you lots of beef and toddy,
For jolly Christmasses sake.

"But that is not half so bad as some of them were. I greatly enjoyed my editorial work, and I should like to add that I think card publishers are rather maligned by verse writers. I have had my little differences and difficulties, but have found them on the whole liberal and pleasant to deal with."

"And now, Miss Burnside, if one may venture upon the question, what do you think of the present standard of card verses?"

"It has from the first been my aim to raise the quality and standard of these verses, and certainly the verses which were published years ago would have no chance of acceptance to-day. In my own experience I find that what I consider my best work is generally rejected. Simple, pleasant verse is preferred to poetry. It is a curious fact that, after all my editorial experience, I am no judge of my own work. I can never tell which, out of any given set of my verses, will be accepted."

Miss Burnside did not mention, but it is right to say that she has gained no small reputation in other departments of art. The Royal Academy accepted one of her pictures before she was nineteen, and two on subsequent occasions. For some years she was designer to the Royal School of Art Needlework, where her drawings won the special approbation of the Princess Christian.

SAMUEL K. COWAN, M.A.

Major Cowan, M.A., is a son of the late Andrew Cowan, Esq., J.P., and he began to write poetry almost as soon as he



From a photo by]

[Muir, Belfast.

MR. S. K. COWAN.

could spell. In his pleasant country house near Belfast he is fond of telling how his first recorded piece—an address to the moon—was written at the age of eight. When a

boy at school he established a trade in poetry on the old principle of barter, receiving remuneration for his efforts on somewhat after the following scale :—

One four-line verse for valentine = 2 sweets.
Two four-line verses for birthday card = 4 sweets.
One sonnet = stick of candy.
And so on, *pro rata*.

He is now well known as a leading Irish poet, nine volumes of collected verse having appeared from his pen, in addition to a vast amount of ephemeral matter. At our request he kindly spared time to talk of his Christmas card work.

“How was it, Major Cowan, that you turned your attention to this branch of literature?”

“It came about in this way. At the suggestion of the Rev. Frederick Langbridge, of St. John’s Church, Limerick (who was familiar with much of my magazine work), I first submitted some Christmas verses, in March, 1883, to Messrs. S. Hildesheimer & Co., and Raphael Tuck & Sons, sending twelve verses to each. The former firm accepted four, and the latter seven. Mr. Adolf Tuck explained that he had rejected my other verses because their subjects appealed to too slender a market. And no wonder, for the subjects were: ‘From a mother to her son at sea’: ‘To an absent friend’: ‘To a lady, come of age on Christmas Day’: ‘To a friend forbidden the house’: and ‘From a son at sea to his widowed mother.’ Acting on his advice, I widened my sphere of subject, and discarded the use of several phrases, such as ‘darling,’ ‘friend,’ and ‘love,’ which narrowed the market for the verse.”

“I suppose that your annual output since that time has been pretty considerable?”

“My first year’s work totalled 146 verses, 101 of which I wrote for Messrs. Tuck. In 1884 my total increased to 661, and during the next year—my record one—1005 verses were accepted by eleven publishing firms.”

“What do you consider to be the essential qualities for work of this kind?”

“The special qualities which make poetry suitable for Christmas cards are, in my opinion, simplicity and melody. Of course, a pretty sentiment is an essential requisite—the very *raison d’être* of the whole business—but the general public have not time, in the hurry of Christmas shopping, to fathom a pretty sentiment that is obscure, and their ear will be naturally offended by a rugged rhyme or rhythm. A verse to suit a Christmas card ought to be tender, tuneful, and simple; like *Homœce*, it should ‘touch the spot’ at once.”

“And when and where does the Muse most favour you?”

“At any time and anywhere; both by day and night, at home, along the country lanes, and in camp. Nothing puts me off my work when I once make up my mind to do it. I have frequently sat up all night to complete

*Like music, set to happy words,
May all your New-Year flow along:
And may your heart, on all its chords,
Accompany the happy song!*

Samuel K. Cowan.

AUTOGRAPH VERSE BY MR. COWAN.

an urgent order, my greatest achievement—from midnight till 6 a.m.—being twenty-five eight-line verses, written to design. For many years I made it a point to compose a few verses every day, and lay them aside for future contingencies; I have now, however, discontinued this system, and write only to order or design, principally the latter. My earlier practice gave rise to an odd mishap. Out of my accumulated stock, I sent in error to a French firm half a dozen condolence, instead of wedding verses. Strange to say, they accepted them all, save one, which they returned with the remark, ‘Please you to make the enclosed wedding verse a little less *triste*.’ As I stated before, the largest number of verses I ever composed in one year was 1005, classified as follows: 79 birthday, 46 valentine, 22 wedding, 13 Easter, and the remainder Christmas, New Year, and general verses. Since then valentine verses have

entirely gone out of the market, but wedding verses have increased."

"How do you account for the change?"

"Well, perhaps the present bicycle craze may have something to do with it. The up-to-date young man and the New Woman, flying along at the rate of twelve miles an hour, have no sympathy with those who moon by the wayside, and moan, 'The time I've lost in wooing,' but rush headlong into matrimony without further ado, and thereby 'boom' the wedding-card market."

"Can you tell the readers of the WINDSOR MAGAZINE how many verses for cards you have written in all?"

"I estimate my entire Christmas work since I began writing in 1883, at 6500 verses, or an average of 500 verses per annum. At present I do not write for so many firms as formerly, as I consider that the value of one's work is lessened by a universal market; but as I am commissioned—in addition to some smaller work—by four houses (two of them 'comic' firms) to supply them with all their literary requirements, my yearly average output is fully maintained."

"I understand however that this does not represent the whole of your literary activity?"

"By no means. Since the year 1885 I have been entrusted with much work of a more important and abiding character, such as the beautiful floral albums and other similar volumes of the fine art publishers, including Messrs. Tuck's 'Jubilee Lyric to the Queen,' and many other books and booklets. I should like to add that for any success I may have achieved in the domain of Christmas card work, I shall always hold myself largely indebted to Mr. Adolf Tuck, whose sagacious counsel and advice in past years were only equalled by his hospitality, and I look back upon my many transactions with his firm as the pleasantest episodes in my literary career."

CHARLOTTE MURRAY.

Among the writers of healthy religious verse few names are more popular with the general public than that of Miss Charlotte Murray. Hearing that she had entered the ranks of the card writers we sought her assistance in the preparation of this article, and on a certain wet day in the Highlands she was good enough to favour us with some of her experiences.

"Almost as far back as I can remember," she said, "verse has always been my outlet for deep emotion. One of my earliest attempts was after I had left babyhood and was old enough to lead others into mischief, which I had done on the day in question when we were engaged in a game of ball. The ball was being thrown by the younger children to me at an upper window. As night had been expected the ball missed its mark and went through a pane of frosted glass instead. My mother was out at the time: how should I tell her when she returned? To solve the difficulty I be-

thought me of verse, and began carefully composing my confession, which ran thus—

"Oh, mother dear, the window's broke!"
(Thus to her mother Charlotte spoke).

"I really am so very sorry
I'm sure you'll blame me for my folly.
I was playing with the children, mother,
When I just thought I'd have another
Throw with the ball . . ."

"At this point I had to fly suddenly to prose, for my mother appeared on the scene!

"Thus years went on and my doggerel flowed apace until at length, in the old literary institution at Hastings, I was suddenly fired with an irresistible longing to write verses that might help others, and that might be published. This with more or less power I was enabled to do from that



From a photo by]

[Pannell, Brighton.

MISS CHARLOTTE MURRAY.

time, month by month, through the kindness of Messrs. Drummond, of Stirling, who always allotted to me two corners in their magazines. Two hundred of these poems have since appeared in two separate volumes. The first one, 'Messages from the Master,' has just reached its twentieth thousand. After that came requests from London firms for Christmas card verses, etc., since which time I have been constantly writing."

"I presume your card verses must have reached a very high number by this time?"

"I cannot tell you exactly how many verses I have written, for that would require a lengthy calculation, but I can only express thanks to my friends that they have not wearied of my voice before this."

"And have you formed any decided

on the card opened arrested her attention. It ran thus—

'Is life worth living?' are you sadly asking?

"She stopped, read the poem through, bought the card, and is now finding life quite worth living, from the highest standpoint."

We may add that Miss Murray last year brought out her first prose work, entitled "Morning Sunlight," and is this year issuing her third volume of poetry, called, "Eon the Good."

—
"EVAN T. KEANE."

The gentleman who writes under this pseudonym is a clergyman holding a public position, and is the author of an important

*Behind our life, the Weaver stands
And works His wondrous will;
We leave it in His all-wise hands,
And trust His perfect skill.
Should mystery enshroud His plan,
And our short-sight be dim,
We will not try the whole to scan,
But leave each thread with Him.*

Charlotte Murray

AUTOGRAPH POEM BY MISS MURRAY.

opinion as to the qualities which a card verse should possess?"

"I should say that they are simplicity, directness, and a sympathetic tone; in fact, that every card should be a true message from one heart to another."

"Doubtless you have met with many interesting experiences in connection with this branch of your literary work?"

"I have never published anything of a purely secular character, therefore most of the incidents connected with my writings are of too private a nature to repeat. But just this I will say, that a young lady told me a short time ago that a card of mine, exposed in a shop window, was the means of arresting her in her intention to commit suicide. She was on her way to throw herself off the pier-head, when the question with which the poem

school book, but as he prefers, for the present, to remain unknown, we are unable to publish his photograph, or to give any further details of his clerical and scholastic career. In answer to our inquiry, he kindly furnished the following statement about his verse-writing:—

"I have written verses since I was fourteen, but never attempted to publish them until last year, when I had an introduction to the acting editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Since then I have been lucky enough to have verses accepted by the *Pall Mall Magazine*, the *Spectator*, and the *WINDSOR MAGAZINE*, at various times.

"My connection with Messrs. Marcus Ward began last February, when they gave me the first prize in a competition for verses suitable for a Christmas card, and

subsequently kindly gave me commissions for other verses. Some of the verses published are recent; others date as far back as the age of seventeen. Most of the verses written for Messrs. Marcus Ward are recent.

*Sweeter than than southern air
Blowing over gardens fair
Milder than than dew that lies
On tired blossoms' drooping eyes.*

AN AUTOGRAPH VERSE BY 'EVAN T. KEANE.'

"So many people write verse nowadays that I can only wonder at my good fortune in obtaining a small footing in the magazines."

By special permission of Messrs. Marcus Ward we are enabled to quote the first and last stanzas of "Evan Keane's" prize poem:—

White Star of Bethlehem, we come to thy manger,
Little children singing in the frosty night;
White Star of Bethlehem, guide us from all danger,
Keep our souls from darkness with Thy silver light.

* * * * *

Shepherd of Bethlehem, long is day a-breaking,
Many of the children like sheep have gone astray;
Shepherd of Bethlehem, still watching and waking,
Call us closer to Thee till the dawning of the day.

GERTRUDE E. SHAW.

Amongst the cards published by Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co., and by other firms, the initials of Mrs. Shaw will often be seen. Although away from home at the time, she very kindly spared time to tell us of her work. In answer to a question about the beginnings of her poetical career, she said:—

"It is difficult to fix the time when I began writing verses, for I was fond of attempting them as a child, but my first serious efforts in the direction of poetry were translations from French and German authors. Most of my earlier years were spent on the Continent, so that these languages were quite familiar to me.

"Like many youthful writers I published a small volume of poems anonymously, at my own expense, some years ago. The greater part of the issue was never sold, and has probably now been used for waste paper. To increase the difficulties of disposing of my little work, the literary concern which published it became bankrupt—whether due to touching my poetry or not, who shall say?

"I began writing Christmas verses between three and four years ago. I suppose that I was led to do so by the fact that a poet not only has a song to sing, but wishes for a little human sympathy in the singing of it. As, in spite of all my efforts, no one would take the slightest notice of what I was doing, it struck me that as the public were so casual in the purchase of Christmas verses, there was a chance in this

field of striking up a passing acquaintance, which might here and there ripen into friendship. There is no doubt I am succeeding in this, and I believe there are now a few people who recognise my name and find time to read what I write. The fact that writers of Christmas verse are often looked upon as a lowly order in the literary profession did not trouble me, believing as I did, and do now, after considerable experience, that the literary value of a Christmas verse need not be an inferior one. On the contrary, the concentration necessary to condense what is practically a short poem into four or six lines is a very useful education in the art of writing verse, and in working on longer poems, I now find my facility for expressing much in a few



From a photo by

MRS. SHAW.

[Lewis, Clifton.]

words very greatly increased. To a conscientious writer of Christmas verses, redundant words are impossible.

"Of the first three publishers to whom I submitted card verses, Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co. accepted some, and further gave me a commission to write verses to special designs. Since then, out of fifty publishers of Christmas cards, thirteen have by degrees become purchasers of my verses. I suppose I have now written about a thousand verses for Christmas and birthday cards."

"What do you consider to be the essential qualities of a successful verse?"

"If by successful you mean saleable, I know of no standard. There is a great deal of trash printed, as well as good verses; in fact, probably far more trash than poetry.

CLIFTON BINGHAM.

It is scarcely possible to glance over a heap of music without encountering again and again the familiar inscription, "Words by Clifton Bingham." Few song-writers are better known to the public than the author of "The Promise of Life" and "The Dear Homeland." But Mr. Bingham is also a prolific writer of card verses, and it was upon this subject that we enjoyed a short chat with him, at the close of a day which had been diligently devoted to this branch of his work.

"Yes," he said, "I've been writing songs now for fifteen years, and have composed many hundreds in my time, some of which have become very popular. I have only written card verses during the past five

Loving wishes every Christmas flowing
 Whither whence we will not question. flowing
 That your gentle breath, like zephyrus blowing,
 Over all the earth is coming, going
 Kindly touches, tender thoughts bestowing
 So, sweet wishes, go on glowing flowing!

Gertrude C. Shaw

A CHRISTMAS WISH, BY MRS. SHAW.

Personally, I consider that I have succeeded when in a few lines I have poetically or humorously expressed in a novel manner some kindly wish or thought. There are many different styles required by different publishers, varying with the public they cater for. A verse rejected by one will often be accepted at once by another, but there is often a difficulty in finding out precisely what a publisher requires. In a word, to sell his work to good publishers, a writer of verses must make them good: how much greater must be the difficulty of the writer of religious verses, who often has to make them 'goody' as well!

"Broadly speaking, there are three classes of Christmas verse—the humorous, the playful, and the serious. Of these, the first two meet with the best sale, but the last allows the best field for the poet."

years, but they already mount up to some thousands."

"What do you consider are the points of a good card verse?"

"Oh, simplicity, certainly; that is the main thing. They should not be elaborately poetical, nor too sentimental. It is essential that they should express a happy sentiment in a pleasant, flowing rhyme. Then they should always be short—a four-line verse is the most generally useful."

"And what are your methods of composition, Mr. Bingham?"

"Well, most of my work is written up to design. I do a great deal of verse-writing for Messrs. Nister, and I spend several hours every week in their office writing verses appropriate to the cards which have been designed by their artists. The great thing with me is to get a suitable idea, the

versification is a mere matter of practice. Tell me what you want said and I will turn it into a verse while you are saying it. I often get ideas in this way from the poets, notably from Shakspeare. I do a great deal of this sort of work at odd moments—in the railway train, or anywhere in fact. Of course I had to learn the art; my present facility is the result of long practice. I cannot write songs in this fashion, they have to be done when I am in the humour."

"What is the present tendency in Christmas verse-writing?"

"The tendency is distinctly to improve. The standard is much higher to-day than it was years ago. I have tried to do my part to improve the taste of the public."

"Let me only ask you one more question. Do you think that people read the verses on Christmas cards?"

"I am sure that they do. The travellers frequently tell me that some verse of mine has taken with the public and sold well; or on the contrary, that it is not liked and has proved a failure. I assure you that the sale of a card depends quite as much upon the verse as upon the design; but it is impossible to gauge the popular taste."

MAY GERALDINE BATEMAN.

Miss Bateman, whose "Sonnets and Songs" last year won for her a good position amongst our minor poets, has recently joined the ranks of the Christmas verse-writers and gave us a flying interview on the subject

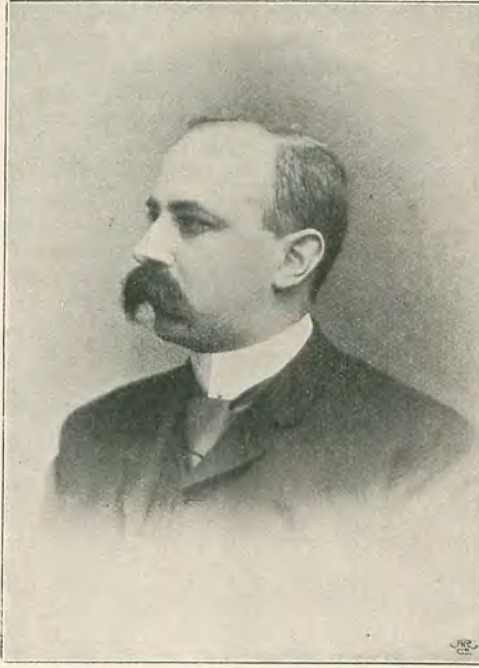
on the eve of her departure for Scotland. The kindness was all the greater in view of the fact that she was very unwell and at the same time greatly pressed with literary work.

"Really I don't know what to tell you," she exclaimed. "You see I am only a beginner, and my story is not at all interesting."

"Well, perhaps you can tell me how you began?"

"Oh, I earned my first guinea for literary work, of a sort, when I was only seven years old. It was in connection with a competition in a children's magazine. But whatever little gifts I may possess in that way are

largely due to the influence of Mr. Ruskin, who has been one of my closest friends ever since I was a child. He used to stay at our house a good deal, and I was much in his company. He taught me geology, and



From a photo by]

MR. CLIFTON BINGHAM.

[Alfred Ellis.

Accept a simple Newbury Card
in token of a friend's regard,
with every wish that heart can say,
or pen can tell, for Christmas day

Clifton Bingham

certainly he formed my taste in literary matters."

"Then his influence was certainly not lost, as witness your 'Sonnets and Songs?'"

"Well, that was more successful than I could have hoped. It was all written within six weeks. It came about in this way: I was ill and unable to use my eyes, and one day some lines were running in my mind and I asked my sister to write them down. When she had done so she said they made a sonnet. I could not believe it at first, but afterwards made some more attempts and

So I sent a few, which were accepted for next Christmas."

"You are now, I believe, very busy with literary work?"

"Yes, my hands are pretty full just now. I am editing a volume, 'The Children's Hour,' for Christmas, and I am engaged to write for a number of the leading magazines. I'm sorry I cannot say more about Christmas verses, but here is a funny tale about my 'Sonnets and Songs,' which may amuse your readers. Have you noticed the dedication? It is like this—

TO

* * *

Well, one day I called on an acquaintance, and found her sending off several copies of my book to her friends. On the dedication page of each she was writing the name of the recipient, and she said to me, 'It was so clever of you to arrange this page like they do on the Christmas cards, so that one can insert the name of the person one sends it to!' There, that has something to do with Christmas cards after all."

THE GREAT UNACCEPTED.

It was found quite impracticable to interview these, owing both to their multitude and their modesty. Their sentiments are said to be couched in language both "painful and free," and for that reason they will not be reproduced here. But we are enabled to give publicity to a few representative specimens of the contributions "which the editor much regrets that he is unable to use":—

A Meaningless Verse.

Oh! Christmas is coming, is coming!
Pile up the faggots and let us be jolly;
The chestnuts are popping, the kettle is humming,
The robins are whistling outside in the holly.

A. JINGLE.

A Gushing Verse.

My darling! I send you this sweet little card
To tell you how fondly and dearly I love you,
When you pass from my vision all living seems hard;
Oh! may angels keep watching and hovering above
you!

V. FARGONE.

A High-Falutin Verse.

The gods on grey Olympus hailed the dawn
When Phœbus with Aurora woke the day;
But brighter than them all this Christmas morn
Art thou to whom I send this rhythmic lay.

CLASSICUS, M.A.

A "Good Old Times" Verse.

All hail to the glorious beef and plum pudding,
The turkeys and geese and the snapdragon too;
Here's to the punch and the ice that it stood in!
Bring in the holly and mistletoe true.

TITUS A. BRICK.



From a photo by]

[Russell.

MISS MAY BATEMAN.

discovered that I really could write verses. That is how 'Sonnets and Songs' came to be written, and now I have another volume ready."

"And you have lately commenced writing Christmas card verses?"

"Only this season, and but very few as yet. I chanced to see an advertisement by Messrs. Marcus Ward & Co. offering a prize for the best Christmas card poem. I did not care to compete, but wrote to the firm suggesting that I might be able to do some verses for them. Mr. Mackay replied that he had seen some of my work, and should be willing to consider contributions from me.

It goes without saying that all these are utterly unsuitable for the purposes of a Christmas card. They have this to commend them, however, that they scan fairly well and that the rhymes are pretty correct, save in the last example. But a worse torture awaits the Christmas card editor in the shape of yards upon yards of doggerel from persons who have yet to learn the first principles of verse-making. A glorious independence of all rules, an originality of rhymes and a limitless number of feet to each verse are a few of the leading characteristics of a large proportion of the "poetical" matter under which the postman staggers daily. We give some choice samples:—

I send this card to greet you on the blessed
morning of Christmas,
It only comes but once a year,
And when it comes I pray it may bring to you and
your business
A very happy time and plenty of good cheer.
W. PROSER.

Brightly the angels sang on Christmas morning
When it came a good many years ago;
May you have a season free from grief and moaning,
And plenty of good cheer and feasting and kind
friends too.
J. MEANWELL.

The method of manufacture appears to be a very simple one. You take a sufficient quantity of prose and then cut it carefully into lengths, not necessarily equal. It only remains to add that the above examples are quoted by special permission of their respective authors, and that all rights are strictly reserved.

Renoucement

Far from my eyes' strained watching,
Love, you passed
Stung at the swift withdrawal of
my hand.
Lonely; achieved your triumph. At the
last,
Facing God's sunshine, will you understand?
May Geraldine Bateman

AUTOGRAPH VERSE BY MISS BATEMAN.