

Christmas at Squire Simpson's.

IT was the day before Christmas ; and when evening came it found Old Mother Earth arrayed in a white fleecy mantle. All day long the large wool-like snowflakes fluttering down lazily and languidly piled themselves up everywhere ; and the branches of the firs and spruces were drooping under their rich apparel.

Somehow at Christmas time an air of cheerful comfort penetrates even into the most barren homes and lowliest huts, and a feeling so vastly different from other times enters the coldest and most callous of hearts. This is the time that God's poor are happiest, for they realize how sweetly sympathetic He was, and how He wished to console them by assuming the nature of man and robing Himself in the garb of poverty.

This evening the little village of X——— seems to be in its most cheerful mood. Lights twinkle from the humble cottage windows and the joyous laughter of the children and the sound of voices raised in song fill the air. Nearby is Squire Simpson's beautiful home with its turrets and gables, but no sounds of music and laughter come from that gloomy looking pile. Only one narrow streak of light comes through a friendly opening in the heavy sitting room curtains and faintly illuminates the outside snow.

Of the members that once comprised the Simpson family only two now remain, namely Squire John and his wife Olive. This evening they are seated before the hearth but neither speaks a word. Something must surely be amiss, for is this not the time for smiles and gaiety ? The fire leaps up with a blue, pleasant flare, displaying a luxuriously furnished room, and does its best to dispel all unfriendly shadows. Still, sadness, which is no respecter of persons, is plainly written on the faces of the old Squire and his wife.

Old John picked up the long iron poker and stirred up the blazing logs—not that they needed attending to, but just for something to divert his thoughts; then settling himself back in his armchair he turned to his wife and slowly said:—

“Wife, we are in the same old place where we began thirty years ago. We were young then and had many things to look forward to. I did not think in those days that to night would find us alone.”

His wife still continued to gaze wistfully into the fire and tears forced themselves down her furrowed cheeks as she answered:

“God knows what is best. It was hard to see them go away and never come back; and then our baby—Sunshine—she is gone too, and we are all alone. Our first Christmas alone!”

“We worked hard to build this home,” continued the Squire. “How happy we used to feel when we’d put away a little sum for the boys; and the careers we had marked out for each; and when Sunshine—our baby—came nothing was too good for her. But the appetite for the world was as strong in her as in the others.”

“I would not care,” said the wife in piteous tones, “if the boys had died at home, I would at least have the comfort of knowing that they were well cared for; but Dick to die out in that savage west, and Jack to get drowned; and then the hardest of all was Sunshine’s going away. She had everything she wanted here, and besides had that love and protection which cannot be found in that cruel, wicked world.”

“Yes, yes, my dear,” answered the Squire. “She had music, painting, and the best education it was possible to give her; but here she had no way of displaying her talent; for what do the village folk know about music and such things. Her head was turned by the flatteries of her teachers who kept constantly telling her of the hit she would make in the world. Of course, dear, we are glad to know that she is doing so well, but still

that does not cure our sad hearts. She might have stayed here and sung for us that need her so badly."

"What was that, John? Bells?" asked Mrs. Simpson, "or was it my imagination?"

"I did not hear anything," he answered. "Perhaps it is some of the boys going to recall the old custom and bring in a yule-log."

"Sunshine!" exclaimed the parents hastening toward her with outstretched arms. Soon she is seated between them at the hearth and telling of her experiences since she left.

"But what made you come home to-night, Sunshine?" asked the father, at the same time stroking her golden hair with a loving hand.

Her answer was: "I got lonely for home, lonely for that true love and protection which is to be found only in the home nest. The world has gaities and amusements; it can bestow upon you adulation and honors, but it is cold, unsympathizing, and that for which the heart yearns it has not. And—and—I was so lonely for mother and dad that I had to come! So I am here for keeps."

Next day was Christmas. The whole village was in its jolliest mood, and the echoes of their merriment penetrating the Simpson home added to what made it their happiest Christmas.

L. L. C.