

CHRISTMAS IS COMING.

"Christmas is coming!" the children cry,
Counting the weeks that are hurrying by,
Dear little children, who live at home,
And do not guess what it is to roam
From morn till night, with stockings feet,
Up and down, through the ice and sleet.

"Christmas is coming!" thinks little Tim,
But what can Christmas do for him?
His home is a cellar, his daily bread
The crumbs that remain when the rich are fed.
No mother to kiss him when day is done,
No place to be glad in under the sun.

That wonderful fellow, old "Santa Claus,"
Who never is idle a moment, because
He is kept so busy with piling the toys
Into the stockings of girls and boys,
No wonder he sometimes forgets, you know,
Into the homes of the poor to go!

But, dear little children, you understand
That the rich and poor all over the land
Have one dear father who watches you,
And grieves or smiles at the things you do,
And some of His children are poor and sad,
And some are always merry and glad.

Christmas will bring to you many joys—
Food and plenty, frolic and toys;
Christmas to some will bring nothing at all,
In place of laughter the tears will fall.
Poor little Tim to your door may come,
Your blessings are many; spare him some.

The Christmas bells will sweetly ring
The song that the angels love to sing,
The song that came with the Saviour's birth:
"Peace, good-will, and love on earth!"
Dear little children, ring, I pray,
Sweet bells in some lonely heart that day.

—Mary D. Brine, in *Independent*.

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

Few of the many residences that bestud the banks of the noble Hudson command such a magnificent prospect as Fairview. Here the eye could range for many a mile both up and down the busy river, while the lofty wall of the adjacent Palisades frowned down on and dwarfed the swift-flowing stream at their base, by their imposing height and grandeur. Surrounding the princely mansion, itself a model of comfort and elegance, the beautifully kept grounds were such as betokened not only the wealth of the owner, but also his good taste.

But it was Christmas day, one of the old-fashioned, representative kind, and a heavy snow storm had obscured everything. The house, grounds and country were clothed in a deep, fleecy mantle, and in the still air the fast falling flakes were settling down as if with a steady determination to obliterate all that did not partake of their own nature and possess their own spotless hue.

The moon was up and full, but obscured. Still, aided by the snow, it gave sufficient light for an observer to notice the form of a man lying under the low overhanging branches of a thick Norway pine, where the ground was clear and dry, closely watching the windows of the neighboring mansion, illuminated for the quiet, family Christmas dinner.

The inmates of the house evidently did not fear prying people, as the blinds were up. They had no near neighbors, and little suspected that one pair of keen and eager eyes were fixed on them collectively, and scrutinizing every form and face which fitted to and fro in festive activity, as if watching for some particular person.

Presently his gaze was riveted on a small room, evidently a boudoir, at one end of the veranda, and, with bated breath, he saw two ladies enter. One, elderly, but hale and hearty, was helping the other—young, pale, feeble and sickly—and led her to an easy chair, where she tenderly seated, and after kissing, sat down beside her.

On witnessing this, the hidden man buried his face in his hands, threw himself flat on the ground, and groaned aloud.

"Would to God I could recall the past! Would to God I could recall the past!" he mut-

tered in the anguish of his soul, and then the strong man burst into tears.

There was a good reason for Mark Smedley's regret, for one false step in life had made him lose much—all, in fact, that is worth living for—honor, wealth, friends, parental love, and the affection of one who had given him the priceless treasure of a true woman's heart-devotion. One unwise move had made him a wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth.

Mark's father was a self-made man, one of nature's nobility, who had risen by industry and integrity to great wealth and influence. On his only son he had, with parental pride, lavished every care to make him a still worthier American, but in vain. With scarcely a wish ungratified, and an unlimited command of money, Mark's career became anything but creditable, either to himself or to his friends. At college he got in debt, chiefly by gambling. After getting out of this scrape, he became junior partner in an eminent banking firm. His father hoped thereby to steady him by contact with staid men of integrity and position.

For a time this kept him from his ruinous course, but at last, led by old companions who followed him to the city, he became deeper in debt than ever, and ultimately brought matters to a crisis by forging his father's name. Detection soon followed, and, conscience-stricken, he fled the country.

His father, against whom he had chiefly erred, was implacable, not so much from the pecuniary loss as from his high sense of honesty and honor. He felt ashamed that a son so beloved—on whom he had lavished so much money—and of whose future he had cherished such lofty aspirations, should have disgraced a name hitherto unsullied.

But there were two who clung to him through his erratic career, and even his disgrace. His mother and his cousin did not excuse his faults. Still they loved and pitied him, hoping ultimately to win him to mend his ways and lead a better life. Amy Stevens, a bright lovable girl and an orphan, had been adopted young, and brought up with Mark, than whom she was only a few years younger. Reared like brother and sister, their affection had ripened into love. Their betrothal, welcomed by the old folks, happened long before Mark's irregularities had become confirmed. When at length these were too open to escape her notice, Amy still hoped for amendment, and strove to further it by frequent counsel. His last and crowning error brought matters to a climax. Hope almost died in Amy's fond heart. After his flight her health fairly broke down. The change in her was now so great that in the thin, pale, sedate invalid whom his mother led in, Mark scarcely recognized the plump, active Amy, once the life and light of the household.

But two years of vagrant life in exile, during which he had often been in great straits, had also left their impression on Mark; and the jaunty, independent young fellow, once accustomed to command and denied no luxury, was now a careworn and crestfallen, badly-dressed wanderer, glad of a day's work or charitable meal. Conscience-stricken and repentant, he had tramped over Europe, till, weary almost of life, he resolved as a last resource to return and ask his father's forgiveness. Having worked his way in a sailing vessel to Boston, he walked home, sleeping in outhouses or the open air. All through the snow-storm he trudged, till, footsore and starving, he lay down under the pine tree to reconnoitre.

As Mark lay concealed, after watching the entrance of his mother and Amy into the boudoir, thinking of what might have been if he had not forsaken the path of duty and honor, a cold chill crept through his frame and made him shiver with a general feeling of illness.

At last sickness and despair nerved him with courage to face the ordeal. Of physical courage Mark had plenty, but the moral strength to meet an outraged and angry father was quite another thing. Seeing that now was his chance or never, he put a bold front on the matter, walked up to the steps, then along the veranda

to the boudoir window and tapped gently.

Hearing the sound, his mother turned half way around to listen. A louder tap brought her to the window, where she could see the form of a man relieved against the white background of snow. Being neither of a timid nor of a suspicious disposition, and assured that he could not be a burglar, she opened the window, which brought him into the full blaze of the light.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she asked.

"Mother, don't you know me?" replied Mark, in a pleading tone, afraid of a rebuff even from her.

"Mark is it you? Come in," was the answer. As she said this a low shriek came from Amy, towards whom the mother and son now rushed, as she had fainted. Ere long she recovered, to find the sorrowing, repentant prodigal kneeling at her feet and his mother's; his attitude and an impressive silence implying far more than words could—his greatest earthly wish for forgiveness; that pardon which already beamed from the tear-laden eyes of those before whom his once proud nature now bent in abject humility.

"Mark," said his mother presently, "rise. Your father must not know of this just yet. You are aware how unbending he is and fixed in his opinions. But why do you look so?"

"I feel ill, mother, very ill. Fatigue, want and exposure have done their worst. But a few days' rest will make me all right, I trust."

"Come with me," said the mother, as she led him through the kitchen—she knew the old cook could be trusted with the secret—then up the back stairs to a spare room, where he could be kept in concealment till the time should arrive for announcing his presence.

That evening's party went on, but two people were ill at ease lest their secret should be discovered. Next day, however, Mark was in a fever and unable to leave his bed, so that the physician who was attending Amy had to be taken into confidence. Old Mr. Smedley had forbidden Mark's name to be mentioned, and it would have been dangerous to transgress just then, and even to let him know that he had again received shelter under the paternal roof without his consent and knowledge.

A few days more decided that Mark's disease was typhoid fever of the worst type. At last he became delirious, and it was feared that his father would discover all by his loud ravings. The crisis of the disease soon came, but the issue was still doubtful. There was great danger. In a few hours he might be dead, or convalescent. The critical situation was fully explained to Mark's mother, who finally decided on telling her husband the whole affair. She found him in the library.

"Frank," she said, "I have news for you. Mark —"

"Mark's name, Mary, must not be mentioned here. I have already strictly forbidden it. Let it be forgotten. Never shall he have aid from me again."

"He may not need it soon, poor boy. Mark is ill, very ill, perhaps dying."

"Where?"

"Here, in his father's house. He came to beg your forgiveness."

"How is this? When did he come? Who gave him permission to enter my door?"

"Pardon me, Frank, for this. He returned on Christmas day. Then, of all the days in the year, could I turn away a repentant sinner, much less my own son? He was ailing. His sickness developed itself into typhoid. Dr. Bone says that his life now trembles in the balance. Our only son, Frank, raves for you, and for your forgiveness. Won't you grant it, dear, for my sake?"

Ere he could reply, a knock was heard and the nurse entered.

"Dr. Bone sends his compliments, and says that as the change is near at hand, you had better come at once, if you would see him alive." Saying this, the nurse withdrew.

"Frank," said Mrs. Smedley, pleadingly, "to err is human, to forgive divine. He is