

who was so poor and an outcast for us. I, myself, will superintend the whole, and pledge myself for the good conduct and happiness of all; and moreover you yourself will accompany and remain among your guests, at least for a little while. I know I am making a bold request in asking this, but I am sure you will not refuse it, and I promise you will not repent it."

The baron acceded to the request. Had he been asked to entertain grand company at his castle, in his present mood he would have refused at once and haughtily; but he was too generous to refuse anything asked in the name of the poor; besides he felt in his heart the truth of what the young priest had said to him: "There is no solace for grief like that of solacing the sorrows of others; and no happiness like that of adding to their happiness."

III.

CHRISTMAS DAY came; and after the Grand Mass was over, the great hall of the chateau was opened, and tables were spread with abundance of good cheer; there were presents for the little children, too; and there were jongleurs who, instead of the customary love ditties, sang old Christmas carols in the soft, Provencal dialect. Amidst the hilarity there was, what by no means common in those days, order and decorum. This was due in part to the restraint and awe inspired by the chateau—opened for the first time in so many years; but more to the presence in their midst of the baron and the priest, who passed from one group to another with a kind word to each.

After a while the priest laid his hand on the baron's arm:

"Let us retire to yonder oriel window—there we may sit in quiet and contemplate the merry scene."

The baron gladly escaped from the crowd, but, as he seated himself, a sigh escaped him, and a cloud gathered on his brow.

"How happy you have made these good people," said the priest. "The merriment of children has something contagious in it, has it not?"