

forming one of the merry party, and immediately set about noting all I saw and heard.

The carpet, in a corner of one of the rooms, was covered with linen, and on this was heaped evergreen wreaths, crosses and vines, and long strings of scarlet berries. A lady, still young, though dressed in black, with a widow's cap perched on the top of her glistening hair, was seated picking out the different ornaments, as they were called for from various quarters, and handing them to a little curly-headed boy who seemed to be acting Mercury. A very good looking Mercury he was, and specially good natured too; for as soon as he arrived at the north end of the room with a load of crosses and wreaths, a shrill voice at the extreme south would call out, "Ned, dear! bring me some berries: that's a love!" (It is astonishing how sweetly affectionate girls can be, even to small boys, when they have an object in view.) So "Ned dear," with the lurching and jumping style of locomotion peculiar to boys, got himself over to the south room, and was hardly there when he was summoned back to the north, till his mother began to wonder if these thoughtless young people regarded her darling in the light of a peripatetic, wound up, to go as long as they might require his services.

The widow, by the way, was Mrs. Payson, the daughter of Mr. Howard, who owned the house and every thing pertaining to it. Then, in a corner of the north room, near a window, was grouped enough bright young life to interest an elderly person for weeks. Close against the crimson curtain stood pretty May Dacre, mounted on a chair, stretching her arms upwards with a long holly-wreath which Jack Abbot was supposed to be twining round a picture frame. How he expected to twine a wreath artistically while his eyes never, by any chance, wandered from May's face considerably below him, is incomprehensible; and why they could not, before they mounted, have arranged all the particulars concerning the twining, and so do away with any necessity for low mysterious conversation, is still unaccountable to me, the elderly person, and was excessively aggravating to Jack's young sister Alice, who stood near by patiently waiting for Jack to come and hang her wreath.

I hope it is not out of place to remark here that the persistent blindness of brother Jacks to the needs of their own sister Alices, when there happens to be any one else's sister near, is always too marked to be purely accidental. And alas! for the sister Alice in