

childhood had known a happy home beneath the roof of a kind uncle, who, childless him-self, had adopted them as his own. It was the old man's custom however, to break up his household in the holiday season, and spend it with the friends who were ever anxious for his presence, sometimes taking his young charges with him, and at others, like the present, allowing them to accept the invitation of their own more immediate friends.

Brightly the ruddy fire leaped and sparkled, and brighter grew the glad faces around it. Frank Stewart had suggested 'fortune telling,' and all were eager to follow in his lead, when Mr. Leslie in reproachful tones, for one so habitually serene, forbade the pastime. 'They had sufficient enjoyment for the present,' he said, 'to prevent their clouding it by looking even in jest into the future. It was not well ever lightly to tamper with unseen things—and who can tell,' he added solemnly, 'how differently we may all be situated and feel, at this time next year.'

His serious words and altered manner produced imperceptibly a cessation of their merriment, and as the evening grew late they rose to say good night, but the tone was subdued and grave, unlike the joyous words of the preceding hours. The sorrow of coming events was indeed casting its shadows before.

Christmas rose—and a brighter day never smiled on a rejoicing earth. Everything sparkled in the golden sunshine, and even inanimate nature told that it was a time of 'peace and good-will to men.' It was a happy party that met round the breakfast table at Mr. Leslie's that morning; and warm were the greetings and kind the tokens exchanged between them. It was no formal speech to wish 'many happy returns of the day,' for they were all bound together by the strong links of kindness and affection; and individual prosperity was matter of general rejoicing.

Crisp and frosty rattled the snow beneath the warm feet as they trod the path to the village Church, decorated with its evergreen wreaths of spruce and fir branches, tastefully hung round the arches and reading desks; and as the appropriate motto glistening in green letters met the eye on entering the church, 'Glad tidings of great joy to you and to all people,' thankfulness thrilled the hearts of that worshipping assembly, for the blessings conferred by Him who was born on this day—a little child in a manger at Bethlehem!

Chastened and happy still, the homeward path was retraced, and the festivities of the day continued. Music and song resounded to the accompaniment of ringing laughter; good cheer was abundant; others had been added to the party of the previous night: the liberal hand had done its mission, and the liberal heart was satisfied. The day sanctified by time and eternity, lent its own blessed influence to all within its atmosphere, and no voice of separation whispered that they all should never meet again; that death would take some, and time divide, and sorrow overshadow all.

Weeks passed on and the winter wore away as that season usually does in the