

Beechwood of to-day is but a poor representative of that which extended its ample shade abroad two hundred years ago. The present Squire is, however, one of the best of his kin. Religious, in any true sense, he does not profess to be, but frugal, careful of his estate, and hospitable he certainly is. He drinks and hunts as his forefathers have since Doomsday, and as his descendants will probably do the day of doom. Quite late in life he married, to-day his only son is born, and this jubilant Christmas morning the little church tower rocks with the music that peals forth the news to all the country-side. In the after-part of the day the village folk are feasted in the Hall; good cheer and good wishes pass around, song and mirth jostle each other, and rejoicing abounds; while the stars from the midnight heaven look down upon it all—as they did upon that other birth which gave us Christmas so long ago.

II.—SUNSHINE IN SHADOW.

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—
THE PSALMIST.

On the northern side of the Beechwoods Park, right against the park wall, there dwelt a young and sorrowful widow. Only a few months before, she was led to the altar by one whose absence she now mourned, she the belle of the village and he its manliest youth. Their wedded happiness was alas! speedily broken. But a few weeks after the marriage the young husband started one early morn, almost as early as the lark, and well-nigh as blithe and gay, to his accustomed toil. Throughout the day he sturdily plied his axe upon the “monarchs of the shade,” but the last that fell, by some untoward accident, crushed to death the young woodman. His comrades lifted the bleeding form, hastily carried it to the cottage in the dell, but as they crossed the threshold the spirit passed to its final home, and bright young Edward Barton ceased to live. Over all the weary wallings and stony griefs that now befel the young widow we draw a veil. Time, little by little, soothed her bruised heart, and, led by his hand, she has reached this Christmas-day. No sounds of mirth come from the humble cottage, and yet the very same event has happened there as that which stirs the Hall so famously—namely, the birth of a son. Leaving the sharp, crisp atmosphere of the early morning, let us enter the cottage. It presents a charming picture of neatness and humble simplicity. The furniture is scant but clean, and every part of the little dwelling bears witness to the “busy housewife’s daily care.” The mother and the babe are in the upper room, while two ancient dames—who are doctor and nurse between them—sit croning over the “wee bit fire” in the room below.

“I met old Elijah Catchpole as I came up,” said Dame Jones, “and he tells me that the Squire’s lady have made him a present