

clergyman should have deprived her husband of the pleasure of spending the whole day in the society of her relatives ; but she consented to the arrangement, and Balfour, with much content, spent Christmas day by himself.

And then, in the hush of the still and sacred evening, this happy family party met round the Christmas board. It was a pleasant picture—for the bare dining-room looked no longer bare, when it was laden with scarlet berries and green leaves, and Lord Willowby could not protest against a waste of candles on such a night. Then, with his beautiful young wife presiding at the head of the table—herself the type of gentle English womanhood—and Honoria Blythe's merry black eyes doing their very best to fascinate and entertain him, why should this ungrateful Scotch boor have resolved to play the part of Apemantus ? Of course he was outwardly very civil—nay, formally courteous ; but there was an air of isolation about him, as if he were sitting there by an exercise of constraint. He rarely took wine anywhere ; when he did, he almost never noticed what he drank : why, was it, therefore, that he now tasted everything, and put the glass down as if he were calculating whether sudden death might not ensue ? And when Major Blythe, after talking very loudly for some time, mentioned the word 'Tichborne,' why should this man ejaculate—apparently to himself—'O good Lord ?' in a tone that somehow or other produced a dead silence.

'Perhaps it is no matter of concern to you,' said Major Blythe, with as much ferocity as he dared to assume toward a man who might possibly lend him money, 'that an innocent person should be so brutally treated ?'

'Not much,' said Balfour, humbly.

'I dare say you have not followed the case very closely, Balfour,' said his lordship, intervening to prevent a dispute.

'No, I have not,' he said. 'In fact, I would much rather walk the other way. But then,' he added, to Miss Honoria, who was seated by him, 'your papa must not imagine that I have not an opinion as to who the Claimant really is.'

'No !' exclaimed Honoria, with her splendid eyes full of theatrical interest. 'Who is he, then ?'

'I discovered the secret from the very

beginning. The old prophecies have been fulfilled. The ravens have flown away. Frederick Barbarossa has come back to the world at last.'

'Frederick Barbarossa ?' said Miss Honoria, doubtfully.

'Yes,' continued her instructor seriously. 'His other name was O'Donovan. He was a Fenian leader.'

'Susan,' called out her brat of a brother, 'he's only making a fool of you ;' but at any rate the sorry jest managed to stave off for a time the inevitable fight about the fat person from the colonies.

It was a happy family gathering. Balfour was so pleased to see a number of relatives enjoying themselves together in this manner that he would not for the world have the party split itself into two after dinner. Remain to drink Madeira when the ladies were going to sing their pious Christmas hymns in the other room ? Never ! Major Blythe said by gad he wasn't going into the drawing-room just yet ; and poor Lord Willowby looked helplessly at both, not knowing which to yield to. Naturally, his duties as host prevailed. He sat down with his brother, and offered him some Madeira, which to tell the truth, was very good indeed, for Lord Willowby was one of the men who think they can condone the poisoning of their guests during dinner by giving them a decent glass of wine afterward. Balfour went into the drawing-room and sat down by his wife, Honoria having at her request gone to the piano.

'Why don't you stay in the dining-room, Hugh ?' said she.

'Ah,' said he with a sigh, 'Christmas evenings are far too short for the joy they contain. I did not wish the happiness of this family gathering to be too much flavoured with Tichborne. What is your cousin going to sing now—

Oh how sweet it is to see,
Brethren dwell in enmity !

or some such thing ?'

She was hurt and offended. He had no right to scoff at her relatives ; because if there was any discordant element in that gathering, it was himself. They were civil enough to him. They were not quarrelling among themselves. If there was any interference with the thoughts and feelings appropriate to Christmas, he was the evil