

## CHRISTMAS GREETING.

Dear Christian friends, we send you greeting.  
The holidays are here.  
And kindly interchange of feeling,  
Becomes the time of year.

'Twas peace on earth, good will to men,  
The angels sang that day;  
When Christ was born in Bethlehem,  
And in a manger lay.

The music of that sacred song,  
Rolls on through ages all;  
Tis heard in every Christian home,  
In cottage, hut, and hall.

The time has come when friends return,  
Who from their homes did sever;  
With joyful face, they take their place;  
But some have gone forever.

We miss their forms, we miss their voice,  
Their sympathy and love,  
But those who loved the Saviour here,  
Have gone to heaven above.

And now they mingle with the blest,  
And sing redeeming grace,  
To Him who loved and brought them home,  
To such a glorious place.

Then let our souls fresh courage take,  
And banish every frown;  
And patiently we'll bear the cross  
Till we receive the crown.

St. Mary's, Dec., 1883.

MARGARET MOSCIP.

## THE DUNCE OF THE FAMILY.

## CHAPTER I.

"Miss Bailey, my dear, will you be so kind as to let the children have a holiday this afternoon? It is my birthday, you know, and my father is coming to dinner at three o'clock. Mr. Wilkinson promised to be home between one and two to take them down to the Docks; so perhaps you will be so very kind as to see that they put on their pelisses properly. Nurse has her hands quite full with the three boys, and I want to get the dessert put out and see to the table."

The speaker was a rather tall, fair lady on the sunny side of forty; a very comely lady, though as she spoke these words she was rather flushed and anxious with maternal household cares; her voice was clear and very sweet, and the look with which she urged her request seemed to suggest that she stood rather in awe of the governess, a slightly severe young person, with very erect figure, thin brown hair, and small but pronounced features, who was superintending the studies of her three little girls, Cicely, Rosalind, and Flora, aged respectively twelve, ten, and eight, whose blue eyes were turned with most eager interest on their mother while she preferred her request and when she turned from the room.

"Now, young ladies!" said Miss Bailey, tapping the table sharply with her thumb to recall their wandering thoughts, "attention, if you please. You have heard your mother's wishes. It is now half-past eleven; in one hour, when the longer hand of the timepiece shall have made the circuit of the dial, we shall lay aside our books for the day."

"Do you mean, Miss Bailey, dear, that we are to put by at half-past twelve?" said Rosalind, a very pretty child, her father's favourite, who was just a little inclined to be flip-pant.

"Such is my meaning, Rosalind. Now be good enough to put all sorts of play out of your head, and tell me why King Henry the Eighth wished to marry Anne Boleyn."

"Because she was so pretty," promptly replied Rose.

"That is quite a mistake, Rose," said Miss Bailey, severely; "Cicely would not have given me such an answer; she knows that such a fleeting and perishable thing as beauty cannot enter into the calculations of kings and princes."

"But was not Anne Boleyn very pretty?" persisted Rosalind. "Father said she was, and so was Helen, and so was Mary Queen of Scots—perfectly lovely."

"But, Rose," interrupted Cicely, "father said that beauty was only skin deep, don't you remember, and he showed us that poor Miss Martin in church. He says she was lovely, with a skin like satin, and cheeks like roses before she had that horrid small-pox, and mother says she can hardly help crying when she looks at her, the very shape of her face is so altered."

"Yes," said Rose, "it was that that made them have us inoculated. Oh, yes, I beg your pardon, Miss Bailey, it was about Henry the Eighth, and why he married Anne Boleyn. It wasn't because she was pretty; was it because she was so clever?"

"She was clever and she was a Protestant, and Henry felt that there had never been a blessing on his union with Catherine of Aragon, who was a Spaniard and a Papist."

"But he was a Papist, too, when he married her, wasn't he?" inquired Cicely, looking sorely perplexed.

"If he was, he came to see the error of his ways. Happily for you, my dear, you are born in quiet times, and your parents hold sound religious views, so that you have the inestimable advantage of good early training. Flo, can you say your poetry yet?"

Little Flo was sitting on a low stool near the fire, with a book on her knees, into which she had not once looked since her mother came into the room. She started at Miss Bailey's question, and blushed, but she did not attempt to answer.

"Flora did you hear me speak to you?"

"Yes, Miss Bailey dear," said a soft tremulous voice, and the rosy cheeks became pale.

"Can you repeat the verse I set you?" inquired Miss Bailey, with increasing severity.

As little Flo had not learnt to read the verse in question, far less to attach any meaning to it, it followed as a matter of course that she was quite unable to repeat it.

"It is just as I expected, Flora," said Miss Bailey, laying down the book with an air of meek endurance; "you have made no attempt to learn the lines, though both your sisters committed them to memory in less than a quarter of an hour, the first time I set them. I doubt if there is one department of your studies in which I could rely on your doing me justice—ordinary justice."

Flora glanced helplessly at her sisters, then stood hopelessly before her instructress, devoutly believing, as far as she was conscious of any belief in the matter, that she was very guilty, and that Miss Bailey had in no way overstated the case.

"Poor little Flo!" whispered Rosalind to Cicely; "it's no use trying to make her learn, it isn't her fault that she isn't quick. Father says it isn't everybody that can learn."

"The poetry must go for to-day, I suppose," said Miss Bailey, with an air of resignation. "Perhaps now you will be able to say the sixth line of the multiplication table."

Flo's face brightened; she thought she did know the sixth line; she had said it to herself after her prayers last night, and to her mother this morning before breakfast, so she started cheerily—

"Six times one is six," and had happily made the statement that "six times six is thirty-six," when there came into the schoolroom through the closed door from the dining room a sharp, shrill cry from an infant in pain.

Little Flo flushed rosy red, turned her eyes towards the door, then appealingly to Miss Bailey, but the governess took no heed of the interruption, and only repeated in a firm tone—

"Six times seven?"

"Baby has hurt himself!" cried the tender, tremulous voice.

"There are plenty of people to take care of baby. Six times seven?"

"Six times seven is eighty four, no—no—six times seven is twenty-one."

"Six times seven is forty two. Six times eight?"

"Six times eight is one hundred and forty-four."

"Count it on your fingers, child. Was there ever such a little dunce?"

Flo did as she was bid; she counted the numbers on her fingers after her governess, but the moment Miss Bailey left her to herself she relapsed into incompetence; she had ceased to be able to connect any idea with the sounds she uttered; that baby's cry had put all her little stock of wits to the rout.

But meanwhile the hour had been passing, and the hand on the clock was approaching half-past twelve. Miss Bailey, who was as much on the watch for this event as either of her elder pupils, brought their studies to a close and dismissed them for the day.

Cicely had put up her books and was going towards the door, when she turned and beheld her little sister, looking blank and scared, with her unlearned poetry still in her hand.

"Please, Miss Bailey, may not Flo come too?" said the elder sister, compassionately.

"Flora has neither learnt her poetry nor said her multiplication table," said Miss Bailey, severely.

"But it's mother's birthday," urged Rosalind, in her sweetest tones; "the fifth of November—only once a year."

"That should have been a reason for her exerting herself, Rosalind. If Flora loved her mother as a little girl should, she would take care not to neglect her studies on her birthday."

At the words "if Flora loved her mother as a little girl should," little Flo flushed rosy red, for her mother was the creature whom she loved better than anything on this earth; then there came a rush at her heart, tears rained from her eyelids, and she broke into piteous sobs.

"But you will let her come and dress now?" persisted Cicely; "father will be home by half past one, and he said he would take us round to see the lions if there was time."

"I should be sorry that Mr. Wilkinson should be disappointed, Cicely, but Flora must leave of crying. It is a pity a child can't be spoken to without giving way to temper," said Miss Bailey, as she swept up the hearth.

Cicely and Rosalind hurried away, Flo still sobbing. They washed her face with plenty of water, made her drink half a tumblerful, brushed and curled her pretty shining ringlets and put upon her the new dress of soft brown woollen cloth, trimmed with velvet exactly like their own, which had been prepared for the day, but poor Flo's heart had been wounded, and every now and then a sob broke out.

Before they were quite ready, their father's voice was heard in the hall.

"Now, girls, whose ready for a walk? I'm ready, everybody ready?"

And Miss Bailey came up to help them on with their pelisses, and to see that everything was in order.

It was the fifth of November, the nineteenth century was in its infancy, and the material conditions of life were very different from what they are now. A narrow-wayed confined city, with great buildings crushed in his heart, so that their beauty and even their size was hardly suspected, no gas, no steam, only the great heart of England pulsing healthily, kept strong and brave by the virtues which had been kindled in it by centuries of manly effort and truth-loving, God-fearing lives.

This particular fifth of November chanced to be a bright, clear day, no fog on the river, but a bright sun shining on the white sails of the merchant ships as they sailed leisurely on the river's broad bosom.

Mr. Wilkinson was the manager of a large East Indian

firm, and he lived on Tower Hill for the convenience of being near the Docks.

The greatest treat his little girls had was when he gave himself a half-holiday and took them for a walk by the riverside to see the shipping, or to the tower to see the horse armoury, and tremble at the mighty beasts main tamed, like many other illustrious and terrible exiles, by the bounty of King George III. of blessed memory.

Like his wife, Mr. Wilkinson was very comely, and his comeliness, like hers, was of the florid type. Light blue eyes, which had more brightness than depth, were set off by a bright complexion, and by brown hair of an auburn tinge, carefully curled and cut short in front, and gathered into a neat queue behind. He wore a rich mulberry suit, with a large flapped waistcoat richly embroidered in the same colour, black silk stockings, shoes with large jet buckles, a small three-cornered hat lightly laced, and a gold-headed malacca cane with a cord and tassel completed his costume.

Mrs. Wilkinson was to have been of the party, the holiday being entirely in her honour, but her anxiety as to the perfection of certain culinary arrangements, and her desire to be at home to receive her father in case he might arrive early, induced her to beg to be excused.

Notwithstanding this disappointment, the walk was a great success. In the first place there were the guys—not miserable apologies for guys, such as disfigure the streets of this overgrown city, but genuine travesties of the arch-traitor, stuffed with straw and gunpowder, and destined to be carted into some eminence, and there exploded to the everlasting disgrace of the Papists and the honour and glory of all true Protestants; terrible creations with masks, that made little Flo shudder and cling to her father's left hand. Then there were the numerous acquaintances with whom Mr. Wilkinson had to interchange greetings, who were not chary of their compliments on his own good looks or on the beauty of his little girls. Then the river was so bright and so full of shipping, and Rosalind was so full of merry talk, and Cicely so anxious to know all about everything, that it seemed quite natural that little Flo should trot along in silence, happy enough to feel that she belonged to so gay a party.

I was five minutes to three when they reached home. As they turned the corner they saw their grandfather, good Sheriff Harrison, step from his big coach, and were in time to interchange greetings with the scarcely less portly coachman and footman as the equipage drove slowly away.

Grandfather was a person of whom even Rosalind stood a little in awe—not on account of anything ungracious in him; but simply on account of his magnificent belongings, his stately manners, and the knowledge that he might any year be Lord Mayor of London.

Mrs. Wilkinson was Sheriff Harrison's only daughter, and it had been generally felt by her friends and acquaintances that Kitty Harrison might have married better, i.e. into better circumstances. But it had been a love match, and the sheriff had given his consent rather than see his dear Kitty unhappy, much to the indignation of his son Josiah, Kitty's half-brother, who for reasons of his own entertained a profound dislike to Edward Wilkinson.

But on this fifth of November, 1806, no one thought of Josiah. The dinner was all that could be wished; Mrs. Wilkinson had outdone herself in the jugged hare and the rice pudding. Sheriff Harrison's special delight, was declared by him to be the very perfection of a rice pudding; so that when the dessert and filberts were put on the shining mahogany table, flanked by piles of rosy apples and golden oranges, with costly Indian preserves in rare dishes, and when the short twilight gave an excuse for drawing the crimson curtains and lighting all the waxen tapers, it would not have been easy to look into a room more full of light and comfort.

Presently there was a sound of feet outside, the door-handle was turned, and in came nurse, carrying baby, newly washed and set in lace and blue ribbons, while two little urchins hung on her skirts; and a third, who might be six years old, and who felt quite patriarchal, preceded her to the table, stopping beside his grandfather, who greeted him with a slap on the shoulders, and looked at him as if he loved him.

"Well, Master Ted, and how many guys have you seen?" a question which at once set Ted's tongue going, and drew the two younger boys to their grandfather's other side.

Miss Bailey and the girls had dined with their father and mother, and Cicely and Rose were busy cracking filberts, peeling apples, and preparing oranges. Little Flo, who sat in a high chair beside her mother, not to disturb the symmetry of the table, had eaten her dinner in perfect silence, still sighing softly now and then from a recollection of her morning's trouble, much dazzled by the display of plate and glass, and supremely happy to be so close to her mother, that she could occasionally touch her soft grey satin dress, and lift an admiring glance to the soft folds of her turban.

Baby being safely deposited in his mother's arms, Nurse, with a beaming face and an apronful of dessert, retired.

"Father, baby wants to give you a bit of his biscuit," said Mrs. Wilkinson.

"He's a gentleman. Why, Wilkinson, what a fine lot of boys you have. It is to be hoped Mr. Boney will get a trouncing soon, and the price of bread come down, or you'll have to ship off some of these youngsters to the Indies."

"Don't talk of it yet, father dear," said Mrs. Wilkinson, clasping her baby very tight. "Wouldn't you like to hear Cicely and Rose play their duett presently—they have been practicing it?"

"Certainly, my dear, by all manner of means, and Flora too, what can she do?"

Poor Flo! All her peace of mind was shattered by this kind, meant inquiry. She glanced apprehensively at Miss Bailey, and flushed painfully.

"O, Flo is only just beginning, father," said Mrs. Wilkinson, covering her distress. "She does not show much taste at present, but Cicely has a pretty touch; and father, you must see Ted dance his hornpipe. Mr. Delville is