

A Dear Little Schemer.

There was a little daughter once,
Whose feet were oh, so small,
That when the Christmas eve came 'round,
They wouldn't do at all,
At least she said they wouldn't do,
And so she tried another's,
And folding her wee stocking up,
She slyly took her mother's.

"I'll pin this big one here," she said—
Then sat before the fire,
Watching the supple, dancing flames,
And shadows darting by her,
Till silently she drifted off
To that queer land, you know,
To "Nowhere in particular,"
Where sleepy children go.

She never heard the tumult rare
That came upon the roof!
She never heard the patter
Of a single reindeer hoof;
She never knew how Some One came
And looked his shrewd surprise
At the wee foot and the stocking—
So different in size!

She only knew when morning dawned,
That she was safe in bed,
"It's Christmas! Oh!" and merrily
She raised her pretty head;
Then, wild with glee, she saw what dear
Old "Santa Claus" had done,
And ran to tell the joyful news
To each and everyone.

"Mamma! Papa! Please come and look!
A lovely doll, and all!"
And "See how full the stocking is!
Mine would have been too small.
I borrowed this for Santa Claus,
It isn't fair, you know,
To make them wait forever
For a little girl to grow."

The Holly.

Christmas is coming! And to the children Christmas always seems to come as something rare. They cannot count up many in their lives; and to them it seems but fitting that the world itself should wear a different face at such a festive time. But some of the children enjoy the mince pies, the glittering trees, and pretty presents, the puddings, and all the rest of it, only by proxy, as it were. They can see them, and hear of them; but absolute possession must be for others more fortunate than they.

In the city of York a carriage was waiting at a shop door. It was a very handsome carriage; tall bay horses drew it, and a tall servant waited near. The shop was one of those where all kinds of fancy articles are sold; and its windows were gay with decoration, bright with the glow of colour and the glitter of gilding. Close to the plate-glass stood an old man and a child. The man leaned as if weary against the frame-work of the window; it was easy to see that he cared nothing for the show within—it was only to please the boy that he lingered there. But he glanced with interest at the carriage and horses, and touched his hat as a lady, accompanied by two little girls, came out of the shop.

"Grandfather, who is it?" asked the boy, gazing after the carriage as it drove away.

"The lady of Roveden Hall. She has come to buy Christmas-boxes for her young folks, I guess."

"Ah!"

The monosyllable had a long-drawn, sigh-like sound on the boy's lips. He was thinking how glorious it must be to live at Roveden Hall, and to possess a mother like that; a mother who could purchase a selection of those beautiful things in the window. Poor little Tom Dimond pushed his cold fingers deeper into the pockets of his thread-bare coat, and turned to give a farewell look at the fascinations behind the plate-glass.

"Come, Tom."

Tom nodded. Then he reluctantly withdrew his gaze from the window, and walked on beside his grandfather.

Tom Dimond was the eldest of three children, who lived with their father and stepmother in a dark and narrow street in the old part of the city. Their own mother had been dead about eighteen

months, and their father, "more for the children's sake than his own," he said, had married again. But the new wife was very young; sharp of face, and sharp of voice. She was harsh to the children, especially to Tom, who was old enough to remember his own mother with passionate love, and to contrast her gentle memory very unfavourably with the new state of things in his home. After school-hours, and on Saturdays and Sundays, it was Tom's chief consolation to steal away to his grandfather's.

"Grandfather" was capital company, Tom thought—worth a score of the lads with whom he might have played marbles in the streets. And grandfather's small room seemed to Tom a decidedly pleasant place.

"Grandfather's" name was William Potter. He had lived in Nottingham in his youth, and worked in the great lace factories there. Even yet he made his living by the lace.

He bought parcels of "oddments"—bits of edgings and trimmings; damaged widths of lace and blonde; curtains, old in fashion or frayed at edges. And of these he made caps, and collarettes, which he sold to his neighbours' wives and daughters. Some of his very best and most "tasty" things went to milliners' shops in out-of-the-way city corners.

He could earn quite enough for himself; but he did wish sometimes that he had a spare shilling or two for his dear dead daughter's little ones. He knew that things went rather hardly with them, and he was powerless to help in any way. He did what he could for Tom. He kept him busy whenever he was with him, for he held that the habit of industry is worth a fortune in itself. He taught him to sort the laces, to sweep the floor, and even to cook "the bits of meals." And he would tell him tales of his own young days;—tales of entrancing interest to Tom, although they always did wind up with a moral. That moral was, in a general way, that God intended men to work in order to live, and to work good work that they might be happy; which was as much of the higher sort of wisdom as Tom's small mind could comfortably absorb.

This evening William Potter had gone to his son-in-law's house, and asked if Tom might spend the night with him. It was Christmas Eve, and he had succeeded in carrying off Tom.

"Grandfather," said the boy, "what is the use of Christmas?"

"We keep the day in remembrance of the Lord's birth," he said; "we keep it for the sake of Jesus Christ."

"But how's that? They don't dress up the shops and eat all those beautiful things for the sake of Jesus Christ," said Tom, mystified.

"Ah, well, that's the other side of the thing! There's those—and they're many—who think little enough about the Lord at all. They just keep holiday, and make fun according to the common custom of the country."

"But if it is the Lord's birthday, they've no right to forget Him, and take the time just for their own fun," said Tom, who had pretty strong opinions sometimes.

"Well, well, my boy, 'tisn't for us to be a-judging of our neighbours. But you and I might try to keep to-morrow as the Lord's birthday, Tom?"

A cart loaded with evergreens passed them, and Tom looked longingly at the masses of shining leaves and scarlet berries.

"Happy Christmas to you, Mr. Potter!" cried a cheery voice behind them. "Will your boy care to lighten my load a bit? I asked for a shilling's-worth of yon green stuff, but I'd no notion that a shilling would get such a bulky bunch. I can't carry all this. 'Tis mighty prickly, I can tell ye."

The speaker was a bright-faced woman, clad in a comfortable shawl and gay bonnet. She detached two good-sized boughs of holly from the quantity she had bought, and handed it to Tom.

The old man thanked her. Tom for once was speechless. But those bright eyes of his had the trick of eloquence, and the woman did not think him ungrateful!

Never had Tom found himself busier than that night. There was all the usual work to do, the sweeping and the rubbing, and all that holly to arrange besides. It was difficult to decide whe-

ther it looked best all in a "bush" over the fireplace, or stuck in separate twigs all round the framework of the window. Tom tried it both ways, and could not settle with himself as to which should be the final arrangement. It was not much use asking his grandfather; he only grunted out, "Yes, yes, very pretty," whichever way it was.

Tom sat down at last and rested his chin on his two fists, as he leant forward on his stool by the fire.

"I wish you'd tell me about Christmas," he said at last. "I can't rightly understand."

"No, my lad; and the angels themselves didn't understand; and the wise men didn't believe. And yet, after all, 'tis a thing that seems clear enough to me. It was the Lord, the Prince of heaven. He looked from heaven, His dwelling-place, and pitied us men, lost in sin and sorrow. So he came; He offered Himself to come and live a life of goodness as a man, such a life as no man had ever lived before. And He offered to die, so as to clear us from the sin such as He Himself had never done."

"Yes, grandfather."

"Well, He came. He lived the holy life. He died the holy death. And He handed the credit of it all to us poor sinners whom He loves; so that all who believe in Him should not perish, but go to Him to be happy and holy where He has gone. . . . That's the story, lad. 'Tis, perhaps, hard for such as you to take it in; but when a man's tired, as I am, tired of failing and sinning and striving, it sounds like the lilt of mother's song on the ears; it does."

"And Christmas?"

"Christmas is just the day of remembrance for us of the hour when He came a baby to the earth. And all who bear His name of Christian should be joyful and thankful that day."

Tom, mystified as he was, caught at those last words in his practical way.

"How can I be joyful and thankful?" he said.

Potter was on easier ground now. He answered quickly—

"Both you and I can praise the good God for His kindness to us, and His blessed Son for the love He has to us. And to-morrow, boy," he added, laying his wrinkled hand on the lad's head—"to-morrow we will see if anyone a-nigh us is poorer and less happy than we; and we can try to pleasure them and make them thankful too. That's one way to please the Lord, Tom—to be good to others for His sake."

Then it was Tom's bedtime; so he brought the brown-covered Testament, and read aloud about the first Christmas Eve, and of the song of the angels at Bethlehem.

Tom dreamt of that wondrous song as he lay on his pallet-bed that night.

Potter's room was in a narrow street quite near to the minster, and on the morrow, Christmas Day, the old man and the child went to the service there.

Little Tom Dimond knelt by old Potter's side that Christmas Day, and saw the sunbeams streaming through the arches; he heard the music stealing through the aisles and echoing from the misty distance of the roof. He "did not rightly understand" even yet. But when the words rang out, "Praise ye the Lord," his childish treble rose clear in the response, "The Lord's name be praised."

Then he fell to wondering again about the angels' song. The clergyman read the exact same words as he had spelled through last night in the brown-covered Testament. Tom looked at the choristers; he knew one or two of them. Their singing was lovely, for sure, but the angels, he guessed, could beat it.

"If ever I get to heaven, they'll have to teach me hard," thought Tom, "for I don't know anything much about singing. I wish I could properly praise the Lord with singing!"

The service was over, and the old man and the boy passed out into the pale winter sunlight.

"Everybody looks happy," said Tom, looking round. "How are we to find anyone to pleasure for the Lord's sake, grandfather?"

Continued on page 776.