

land, 'then I could go out, even if it rained, and people would give me Christmas boxes. Teddy Snow—he works at the big grocer's at the corner, got nine-and-six-pence last year. I think they have jolly times.'

Judith tossed a scornful little head. 'I wish you would not talk to common boys,' she said, 'you don't care what sort of boys you play with.'

'I don't play with him,' retorted Roland, 'I only spoke to him one day when he was waiting at the door for his basket. He is a nice clean boy, and he goes to the Sunday-school, and he hasn't any father, but he has a mother and two sisters just like me. And you are so proud and stuck up, Judith, you think nobody is good enough for you to look at,' finished Roland, getting very red and indignant as well as rather out of breath.

'Come, dear, do not quarrel on Christmas Eve,' said their mother, who came back from taking off her bonnet before Judith had time to reply. 'Judith, dear, is it not time you set the table for dinner? Roland and Nelly, run and fetch some of the things for your sister. And after dinner we must see how happy we can be because it is Christmas.'

Judith moved slowly to do her mother's bidding. After indulging in glibious dreams of being adopted by Lady Eleanor, it was rather hard to come down to such little common everyday duties, and it seemed hardly worth while to remember that her mother liked everything very straight, and that it worried her to hear the plates and glasses put on the table noisily.

They sat round the fire that afternoon, but for some reason they were not as bright as usual, the cloud on Judith's face seemed to depress the others. In answer to their mother's question about what treat they would like for Christmas, Roland began something about a pudding, but was quickly reproved by Judith who, 'I am sorry to say,' condescended to call him a 'greedy pig.' Eleanor meekly said she would like mother to tell them a story, but the history of a wonderful Twelfth-night party given by Lady Eleanor, at which mother was queen, fell very flat because Judith, instead of being interested and asking questions as usual, sat looking into the fire in moody silence.

'I wish we were real poor people,' remarked Roland when the story had come to an abrupt end.

'I am sure we are poor enough,' said Judith, bitterly. 'And you had better not poke the fire, Roland, or it will all burn away in a minute, and mother said that box of coal must last to-day.'

'I mean quite proper poor people,' explained Roland, dropping the poker, 'the sort of people mother does not like us to call common, you know. They have much better times at Christmas than we do, because kind people send them baskets of groceries and pieces of beef, and give them treats. The ragged school in the lane is going to have ever such a jolly magic lantern to-night and buns and oranges as well.'

'And Sarah's mother has had a basket of things to make a pudding,' added little Eleanor, 'and a nice piece of beef, and a shawl for herself, and a frock for the baby.'

Mrs. Manners smiled at the little eager face and ran her fingers through Eleanor's soft, fair hair. 'So you think Sarah's mother and the ragged school-children have the best of it?' she said.

'Yes, at Christmas, mother, not always,' conceded Nelly. 'Why, mother, I have never seen a magic lantern.'

'Poor child! Well, Eleanor, it is something to look forward to. And now suppose you go and have a romp in the attic before tea.'

Roland and Eleanor ran away; Judith re-

mained by the fire, and there was silence until an unusually deep sigh from the little girl made her mother ask,

'Why, Judith, dear, what is the matter?'

'I was thinking,' said Judith slowly, 'how very nice it would be if we could only find Lady Eleanor Ashley.'

'So that is your latest dream,' said Mrs. Manners with a smile, for Judith's airy castles were a proverb in the family. 'And why does the thought of anything so "very nice" make you sigh so deeply?'

'Because it is so unlikely to happen,' answered Judith sadly, 'and we are so poor, and everything is so wretched.' And the tears that had been so near all day overflowed at last.

'Yes, it is most unlikely.' Mrs. Manners spoke in a decided way that she often had when Judith was doleful. 'Lady Eleanor was very good to me when I was a child, but she went abroad with her husband and little boy when I was twelve, and, excepting two or three letters, I have heard nothing of her since. I think she is probably dead. As for our poverty, it would not be likely to make much difference if she came to-morrow, and surely we are not so very wretched while we have each other.'

'But—father,' sobbed Judith, and she would have been very angry if any one had told her that her tears were more for the pleasures that had gone when her father went than for that father himself.

'Yes, we have not dear father, and we miss him very much,' said Mrs. Manners, 'but we know God took him from us and some day we hope to see him again.'

'It is so hard to be poor,' repeated Judith in a low voice.

'Don't you think our heavenly Father who loves us knew best when he made us poor?' asked her mother, 'and ought we not to be brave about it, and very thankful for the good things he does give us? Only think, Judith, not one of us has been the least bit ill all this year. I feel I cannot be too thankful when I remember that one thing.'

Judith did not answer. She sat with bent head, twisting her fingers in and out of each other and tracing the pattern of the carpet with one foot. Within the last few months a spirit of discontent had crept into Judith's heart so gradually that she was scarcely aware how completely it had taken possession of her. Always given to day-dreams and castle-building she had lately set herself persistently to brood over the past and to devise means by which the pleasures they had lost might be recovered. Many a romance did her busy brain weave of unknown relatives suddenly appearing and immediately transporting the entire family to wealth and ease; and many a little act of kindness that would have pleased her mother and brightened the lives of the younger ones, was neglected because Judith was living in a fancy paradise of her own creation.

'Judith, dear,' said Mrs. Manners, at last breaking the silence, 'do not spoil your present by constantly brooding over the past and imagining the future. If poverty is such a trouble to you take it meekly and bear it bravely for his sake who "though he was rich, for our sakes became poor," and believe me, dear child, you will find pleasures even in the poverty.' Then more to herself than to Judith she repeated in a low voice,

"What! was the promise made to thee alone?

Art thou th' excepted one?

An heir of glory without grief or pain?

Oh, vision false and vain!

There lies thy cross; beneath it meekly bow;

It fits thy stature now:

Who scornful pass it with averted eye,
'Twill crush them by-and-by.

"Raise thy repining eyes, and take true measure

Of thine eternal treasure;

The Father of thy Lord can grudge thee nought,

The world for thee was bought,

And as this landscape broad—earth, sea and sky

All centres in thine eye,

So all God does, if rightly understood,

Shall work thy final good."

Mrs. Manners was very fond of poetry, and as according to Roland, she 'knew heaps of it,' she often repeated verses to the children. They loved to listen to her sweet, low voice even though they did not always understand all she said to them; and as she would explain it to them as well as she could and answer any number of questions, these recitations had become one of their favorite amusements. Judith, however, did not appreciate the selection her mother had made on this occasion, she gave her shoulders an impatient twist, and bent her 'repining eyes' obstinately on the floor. At that moment Roland and Eleanor rushed into the room in wild excitement.

'Mother, mother, it is clearing up, it is going to be a fine evening, it does not rain at all. Oh, mother dear, won't you take us out to see the shops?'

The rain had certainly ceased, the pavements were drying, so tea was hurried over and directly after they went out into the gaily lighted High Street, which was full of delights. To see the shops lit up was a novelty, and the busy, merry crowd that passed up and down was most interesting.

'Look at that sugar Santa Claus,' said Roland, as they stood for a moment outside the large sweet shop; and Eleanor, for whom Santa Claus had a great attraction, turned quickly.

'That is Father Christmas,' she said, 'is he the same as Santa Claus?'

At that instant a fair young girl two or three years older than Judith came out of the shop, followed by an elderly woman servant who carried several parcels. Almost unconsciously she smiled at the intent childish face, which immediately brightened and dimpled into the sweetest smile in return.

'Come on, Nelly,' called Judith sharply, and Eleanor ran on to join her mother. As she did so she felt a gentle touch on her arm.

'A merry Christmas, little one,' said a voice behind her and something was slipped into her hand.

'Mother,' she exclaimed, as soon as she had recovered from her astonishment, 'Mother, look at this beautiful box of chocolate. Who could it be, mother? Was it Santa Claus? Did he come into the street because he doesn't know where we live? And it looked like a young lady.'

Mrs. Manners laughed and said she really did not know the habits of Santa Claus. 'But I think we have seen all the shops,' she added, 'so we had better go home.'

'Oh, not yet, mother,' pleaded Nelly, 'do let us go through the lane first. It is quite early, and I want to see if the poor people are having a nice Christmas.'

'The lane,' as the children always called it, was a row of very poor houses that ran along at the back of the street in which Mrs. Manners lived. The little girls' bedroom window looked into it, and the joys and griefs, amusements and occupations of the children in the lane were an unflinching source