

A CHRISTMAS IDYL.

BY HERBERT H. ADAMS.

Ring on! ring on! ye merry bells,
And let me hear thee once again;
Ring out that happy sound that swells
With music meadowland and plain.
Go ringer, take once more your stand
In yonder tower—let troubles cease;
Pull well the ropes with vigor, and
Ring in an everlasting peace.

Ring, ring, ye bells, a joyous peal,
And usher in the Winter King,
Whose aged feet in silence steal
O'er snow-clad field and frozen spring;
Who feebly comes with staff in hand,
With holly twigs around his brow,
To rule the world with stern command,
And fill the place of autumn now.

Hark! to the voices sweet and clear
That echo 'cross the fields of snow,
Of little children coming near
With holly boughs and mistletoe.
What is't they sing?—'Peace and Good will
And Joy on Earth'—the old, old song;
Those blessed words we cherish still,
That tell of Triumph, Right o'er Wrong.

Sweet Robin, messenger of him
Whom we ordain as Winter's King,
So strong of heart, so lithe of limb,
Whose bosom feels not sorrow's sting,
Come, perch upon my window-sill,
For I would gladly welcome thee:
Enjoy your morning meal, and trill
A happy Christmas melody.

Go, little bird, at break of morn,
And tell to all, with thankful heart,
That on this morning he was born
Who bore for us the bitter part.
Go, Snow-King, o'er this world of white,
And seek the poor who perish here;
Go to their homes and, with delight,
Give their weak hearts a little cheer.

Pipe, robin, sweet, your festive hymn:
Ring, merry bells, at close of day;
Sing, children, God's own cherubim,
The good old Christmas roundelay.
Go, men, rejoice, and for a time
Let idle cares and troubles cease.
And usher in, with mirth and rhyme,
A sacred, everlasting peace.

THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER.

BY AMY SINCLAIR.

Squire Lester Chadwick, of Chadwick Manor, was one of my father's oldest friends. When, however, he succeeded to his father's estates, and had no further need to struggle for fame or fortune, their intimacy grew less familiar, although it never entirely ceased. A year or so after my father's death I received an invitation from Squire Chadwick to visit him for a week or two, if I could spare the time. His letter, which was couched in the most frank and genial terms, conveyed also the enticing information that a magnificent trout stream ran through his estate. That temptation was beyond my resistance. I left the narrow limits of my dingy office, with its miniature pyramids of briefs, and ponderous array of legal folios, and, looking out my choicest fishing tackle, posted off to answer in person my esteemed host's proffered invitation.

Night had fallen before I arrived at Chadwick Manor; but, as the post-chaise rolled up to the front entrance, the portly figure of Squire Chadwick, with his good-humoured face beaming with smiles, and his voice ringing with a hearty welcome, met me at the door. He had never seen me, nor I him, since I was a chubby-cheeked boy; and, as we passed into the fuller light of the dining-room, and he welcomed me again with a strong, earnest grasp, I could detect the ghost of old times gliding through his memory. Some expression of my face, or tone of my voice, might have called it up; something, doubtless, that reminded him of the friend who had stood by his side in the dawn of a struggling manhood, when each of them had a name and a reputation to make; before the remote contingency of an unexpected death had placed him aloof from the strife and contention of life's battle-field. No man looked the character of a country gentleman better than Squire Lester Chadwick, and few men have ever played it half so well. It became him—was a part of his nature; and it fell from him as unconsciously as light from a star, or beauty from a flower.

After a light supper, we sat together for an hour or more over the fruit and wine. He spoke of my father with that true and touching respect that worth claims from worth, and lingered over the faded past as though something was seen in its midst which the long-drawn shadows of years could never darken from his memory. "Harvey Rollins, my boy," he said, as he quaffed his third glass of port, and ran his fingers through his white hair, "I dare say you think I am a garrulous old blockhead in ruminating so much upon bygone years; but there are secret springs in the human heart which a touch, a look, a tone, will sometimes call into vigorous action. However, we have had enough of the past for one night, especially as it is your first night under my roof—so now we will speak of the future. You are not my only guest."

"I am delighted to hear it," I replied. "Well, you see, boy, I know that youth prefers youth; it is but natural. I therefore sent for a nephew of mine; he has only just returned from doing the 'grand tour.' You will not find anything very formidable about him, except a plentiful sprinkling of artificial tricks

and fopperies, but those you can laugh at or admire, as best suits your taste. You will meet him at the breakfast table in the morning, and I hope you will like him."

Squire Chadwick's tone indicated a doubt upon that point. Our conversation gradually drew to a close, and, as I felt sensibly fatigued by my journey, his hint about retiring for the night was most gladly welcomed by me.

The first streaks of the early morning sunlight were pouring through the window of my bedroom when I awoke. I arose at once, and having dressed myself, descended the wide oak staircase, crossed the hall, and took my way into the park. The pure breeze, scented with the odor of flowers, the curling wreaths of mist creeping over the wavy grass, the dense foliage of grove and glade, the swelling song of the birds, the sloping hills belted with ridges of undulating green, and above all the pale blue sky, radiant with the sunshine, sent my blood coursing through my veins with joyous thrills. With a fearless bound I crossed the park, sprang over the low fence, and was quickly out of sight, buried between hedgerow banks or lost in the obscurity of some woodland glen.

After an absence of two hours I returned to find the house astir. The front door was open; great stamens of fuchsias, and roses, and geraniums stood just within the shadow of the hall. I passed on to the drawing-room; there was little that was grand or stately about it, if I except the portrait of an ancestor in courtly costume. There was an atmosphere of elegance, of refinement, and of substantial comfort pervading the apartment. One side of it opened through a pair of large glass folding-doors into the conservatory, adorned with every variety of plant, and flower, and creeper. Clusters of arching vines hung from the dome-shaped roof, and the golden petals of tropical flowers shed their incense around.

As I entered the roseate arcade, the sound of voices met my ears. Pausing and looking through the overhanging branches, my eye fell on the figure of Squire Chadwick. Only a moment it rested there. Standing by his side, with a face of beaming loveliness uplifted in a smile, was the graceful, sylph-like form of a young girl. Her features were shown to me at first in delicate profile; but, as my glance caught their fuller contour, with masses of raven ringlets shifting and falling in rich shades over cheek and shoulders, a light seemed to gleam on my soul with the warmth of a sunbeam. How striking the contrast between the two! Squire Chadwick, with his snowy hair and russet complexion, with scarcely a visible wrinkle on his happy face, and his bright blue eyes looking clear and smiling; the maiden, with her ebony curls, black as midnight, her lustrous eyes of piercing brilliancy, and the soft olive tinge that shaded the ripe bloom of her youthful features. I felt spell-bound by her extraordinary beauty and grace. Who could she be? Not a daughter of Squire Chadwick's, for he had never married. A niece perhaps, or—

Before I could solve these questions, or recover from my surprise, my presence was detected.

"Who the deuce is that playing at bopeep there?" cried Squire Chadwick, in a merry voice. "Ah! Harvey, my boy, is that you? Come forward, and let me introduce you to Alice. This is Mr. Harvey Rollins, the son of my old friend. My daughter, Alice Chadwick. And I hope you will never esteem each other less than you do at this moment."

The young girl was his daughter, then, and he had been married. I tried in vain to reconcile these two facts with all that I had ever heard or known of the Squire's previous history. My father had frequently spoken of a bitter disappointment which the Squire had experienced in his youth, and told how faithfully he had kept his resolution never to marry. Yet here I found him the father of a lovely girl. Infinite as was my pleasure at falling so unexpectedly into the companionship of such a wealth of beauty, I could not help conjecturing that possibly there might be a small army of brothers and sisters in reserve.

The thread of my meditation was suddenly snapped by the sweet voice of Alice Chadwick.

"Do you like the country, Mr. Rollins?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied, "and envy those who live in it."

"Pooh, nonsense, Harvey," broke in the squire, "there is little to envy in a country life. It is calm and placid enough, I grant you; so is a duck pond. Man requires excitement—emulation; something to grapple with worthy his prowess; something that gives a force and power to his intelligence."

"To an active mind, doubtless, Squire, the stirring, bustling world is the most befitting arena," I replied; "but there are hundreds of men fighting and scrambling there who would have been ornaments in obscurity."

"Of course," laughed the Squire; "every country attorney cannot be a Supreme Court judge. But here comes my nephew Orville, we will hear what he has to say on the subject."

I looked around, and saw loitering through the shrubbery the slight effeminate figure of Orville Galt. He was dressed in a style of faultless neatness, with a trilling affectation towards dandyism. His features were small but regular, his skin delicately fair, his eyes a deep blue, and his hair a rich chestnut brown. There was a winning expression in the smile that played around his small full mouth as he passed through the formality of his first introduction to me. But

his patronizing, familiar tone to Alice raised my pulse to fever heat, and sensibly diminished the respect which, the moment before, I had entertained for him.

"Pon my word cousin," he said, with a foppish, listless air, "you ought to live in a greenhouse. Your complexion harmonizes amazingly well with the tint of those blushing roses. Don't you think so, uncle?"

"Do I think you a consummate puppy?" was the Squire's brusque retort. "Praise my girl as much as you like, but do it in sensible English. Come along, Alice, and give these fellows their breakfast."

The Squire drew the fair girl's arm through his own, and, without further ceremony, led the way from the conservatory.

"What an insufferable old boor!" ejaculated Orville, half aloud, as he walked by my side. "She is a deuced fine girl, though, don't you think so, Rawley?"

In spite of my annoyance I could not repress a laugh as I replied, "My name, Mr. Orville Galt, is Harvey Rollins."

"I beg pardon, 'pon my word," he exclaimed, "but we were speaking of my cousin. It is the most absurd affair in the world. Do you know my uncle has sent for me here to make a choice?"

"A choice!" I said.

"Yes," said he; "a choice between a wife and a commission in the Guards. Now, which would you select?"

"I am really at a loss to say," I replied.

"Well, so am I at present," said Orville; "I have a fancy for both. But, hush!—not a word about it to the Squire."

At this point we had reached the breakfast room, and found the Squire diligently dissecting a chicken.

"Now, Harvey, boy," said the Squire, as I took a seat beside Alice, "after breakfast I will show you the way to my trout stream. It is well preserved, and you will find plenty of sport."

"Thank you," I replied; "but I have found the way there already."

"The deuce you have! When?" was his astonished question.

"This morning I was up and out at sunrise," I replied.

"Not muddling your brains with a lot of legal quirks and quibbles, I hope?" said Squire Chadwick.

"No," I laughed; "I was brushing the dew from the green turf, startling the deer in the park, and frightening the poor, timid hares as I scampered over the hills."

"You are beginning with a quick pace, boy," he exclaimed; "I hope it will last."

"Deuce take it, uncle," chimed in Orville, "you don't suppose that a young fellow like our friend here is—"

"To be compared with an old cob like me, eh! Orville?" interrupted the Squire. "When were you up at sunrise, I should like to know?"

"I cannot fix the precise date," replied Orville, affectedly twisting his hair.

"Now, don't be grinning at Alice like a monkey before a barrel-organ," laughed the Squire. "She has no taste for the dissipation of routs, and soirées, and operas. Have you, Alice?"

"Oh, yes, papa, I doat upon the opera," replied Alice, archly.

"You should go to Naples, cousin, if you want to hear an opera," said Orville. "The Italians—"

"Pooh! Foreign rubbish! I don't believe in it!" cried the Squire, in a lusty tone. "There is as good music in America as there is out of it."

Squire Chadwick seemed to have an idea that his orthodox opinions about music were in imminent danger; so he cut the matter short by retiring from the table, and seeking refuge behind a newspaper.

Orville, Alice, and myself took advantage of the movement to slip quietly away and join in a walk through the grounds.

Before we had proceeded far Orville unceremoniously seated himself beneath a tree and lit a cigar.

I was now alone with Alice—alone in dangerous companionship with whom for whom the first germ of a passion had already possessed my heart. I feared to acknowledge to myself the realities of the risk I was incurring. Squire Chadwick might have other views, other wishes for his daughter, and should I, his invited guest, the sharer of his hospitality, presume to cross those views or blight those wishes? I felt my manhood quail at the question.

Still, as we walked on through the labyrinth of overhanging bows, with the summer air laden with the breath of summer flowers around us, Alice's voice, eloquent with the music that awakens the dreaming spirit of a first pure love in the soul, my hopes grew into rosy fullness, and the phantom of fear became more and more impalpable. Yet through that bright, sunny hour, not a look was dared, not a whisper breathed which the sternest formality of a newly-formed friendship might not have claimed as a rightful homage. And while lip spoke to lip the transient thoughts called from the fleeting littleness of the passing time, the first silent conflict began its stern work within—a conflict which the maturity of time might portion to one a wrecked peace, to the other an unblest life.

We had made the tour of the grounds, and were returning indoors by the shrubbery walk, when we suddenly encountered the Squire.

"Why, Harvey, boy," he cried, with a cheerful laugh, "I thought you were up to your knees

in the trout stream by this time; and here I find you, like a lovelorn knight, dallying by the side of his lady love. Well, Alice, how do you like him? Does he improve upon your acquaintance?"

"Oh, yes, papa, Mr. Rollins is a delightful companion," was her artless reply.

"Is he?" said the Squire, in a dry, caustic tone, at the same time fixing upon me a keen, penetrating look. "He has been telling you how cleverly he won some breach of promise case, I suppose, and so reaped the eternal gratitude of the deluded damsel who brought the action."

"Oh no, papa, Harvey—I mean Mr. Rollins," she stammered out in artless confusion, "has been reciting to me some of Longfellow's and Tennyson's poems."

"Ah," sneered the Squire, good-humoredly, as he alternated his sharp gaze between Alice and myself, "those are the flies you bait with, eh? But what have you done with Orville?"

"He retired from our company to the more social enjoyment of a cigar," I ventured to reply.

"Yes," continued Alice; "we left him under one of the trees in the beech walk."

"Well, go and put on your riding habit, Alice," said the Squire. "I have ordered the horses out. Harvey and I will go in search of your cousin. He must accompany us."

A laugh of girlish glee told the fair girl's joy, as with a light, swift step she bounded from our presence.

"Nothing artificial there, Harvey," said the Squire, as he followed her retreating figure with a proud, fond look; "a piece of Nature's rarest handiwork; not in the mere outside beauty of form and face either that her priceless value lies. Now mark, if you knew how pure and bright, and warm is the little heart that swells beneath, you would own—But there," he broke out with an abrupt laugh, "confound it, you will think me in my dotage to talk in that strain to a phlegmatic, thin-blooded lawyer. Come along, and let us hunt up my puppy of a nephew."

He linked his arm in mine, and we directed our steps to the beech walk. There, under the shady canopy of a tree, stretched full-length upon the grass, with his head resting on one of the gnarled roots, lay Orville, wrapped in a profound slumber. The Squire rubbed his eyes before he looked at him a second time, and then in a state of hazy bewilderment, cried, "By Jove! the fellow must have fainted, Harvey." A snore sufficiently loud to startle the rocks overhead quickly dispelled that illusion. "Eh!" exclaimed the Squire, timidly venturing on a closer survey of the inanimate figure, "why, I declare the puppy's asleep!"

"Taking a dip, Squire, in 'sore labor's bath,'" I smiled.

"I wish I had a watering-can or a wasp's nest at hand," was the Squire's grim rejoinder. "Stay; my snuff-box will rouse him."

The Squire deliberately took a huge pinch of snuff from his box, and adroitly plumped it in the shape of a miniature molehill under Orville's nostrils.

There was a brief, silent pause, and then an explosive sound, which sent the startled sleeper to his feet in a state of intermittent sneeze.

"Why, Orville," roared the Squire, "what the deuce ails you? Don't make those monkey-fied grimaces at me, but speak out at once!"

The ludicrous contortions of Orville, as he perseveringly endeavored to speak, elicited accompanying peals of laughter from the Squire, and produced remote symptoms of apoplexy in his humorous visage.

At length there was a slight lull in the storm, and Orville succeeded in jerking out his syllables in a dislocatory style.

"It is—very absurd,—the most—absurd thing in the world." Having reached the end of that sage observation, his olfactory nerves resumed their normal state, and he added, "Sleeping on the damp grass has given me a violent cold."

"In your nose?" shouted the Squire.

"Yes, and eyes too," replied Orville, as he wiped the trickling tears from his cheeks.

"Well, we must tell the housekeeper to make you a treacle posset, and you had better keep your room for a day or two," laughed the Squire, as he winked one of his merry eyes at me.

Orville made a dismal effort to join in the laugh, but the failure was so manifest that I good-naturedly came to his assistance.

"Mr. Galt is better now," I said; "a canter across the country will be more beneficial than a treacle posset."

"Oh, the Squire was only jesting there," said Orville, smilingly. "My uncle is very fond of a joke, especially if it is a grim one. What on earth made me fall asleep? It must have been the cigar."

The Squire gave a feeble grunt, and muttered something about "lazy puppy" as he turned to retrace his steps.

When we reached the hall-door we found the horses saddled, waiting our return. Alice was already mounted on a chestnut mare, a superb, spirited animal, but the compact and graceful firmness with which she kept her seat proved her to be a skillful rider.

Whether Orville had resolved within himself to make the *amende* for his previous remissness to Alice I know not. Throughout the ride, however, he kept closely by her side. The roads we traversed were for the most part so narrow that there was barely room for two horses abreast to pass. I tried by every artful stratagem I could devise to force my way to the front, but after a series of defeats I was compelled to accept with equanimity my somewhat equivocal position.