

"Can't yer fix it?"

"Give us a look," said Freddy, cheerfully, taking the doll in his hands. Nance, exhausted, left off crying, and let one dim eye emerge to watch the proceedings.

"Why, it's all right, Nance," he said gently. "We'll 'ave 'er fixed up in no time."

Freddy, the eldest, was the idol of the family. Since the children were left motherless two years ago, Freddy had done everything for them. He was a slight boy of nine, with a sallow skin and fair fluffy hair, and big eyes that looked very blue in his colourless face. He was known down in the court as the "Little Aingel," and those blue eyes had an irresistible appeal about them. It was wonderful what an influence this small boy had, and what a lot of work he got through in a day.

Freddy washed his small sisters with care, and, as it was Saturday night, put the hair of the two elder ones in curl papers, with what skill he might, according to his mother's injunctions. "Look after 'em, Freddy, and curl their 'air of a Saturd'y night!" was one of the last things he remembered her saying as she lay pale and dying, her thin hands laid on the children asleep beside her in the one bed the room boasted. He often dreamed of her still.

At last they were all tucked in safely, and Freddy took his cap and a tiny paper packet off the mantel-piece. "Go to sleep, young 'uns. I'm jus' goin' acrost to see Nell Pyne a minnit, 'cos she's sick, and if I don't fin' yer snorin' when I gets back, yer knows what!"

"Yer 'aven't kissed us, Fred," murmured Nance.

"Nor I 'aven't!" he said, returning promptly. "I don't 'arf do this job."

He kissed them in turns, and they clung round his neck with fervour, Nance claiming to be the last.

"Yer arms is thin, Nance! I can feel the bones of 'em when yer 'ug me up like that," said Freddy, looking at her with some concern, when he was released. "Now go to sleep—sharp!"

The Baby

"She is a little hindering thing,"

The mother said:

"I do not have an hour of peace,
Till she's in bed.

"She clings unto my hand or gown
And follows me
About the house, from room to room,
Talks constantly.

"She is a bundle full of nerves,
And wilful ways;
She does not sleep full sound at nights.
Scarce any, days.

"She does not like to hear the wind,
The dark she fears;
And piteously she calls for me
To wipe her tears.

"She is a little hindering thing,"
The mother said;
"But still she is my wine of life,
My daily bread."

The children—what a load of care
Their coming brings;
But, oh, the grief when God doth stoop
To give them wings!
—The Independent

Christmas Thoughts

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As they offered gifts most rare
At thy cradle rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure, and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King.

Amen.

—Hymn 31, Book of Praise