

CHRISTIE'S CHRISTMAS.

BY PANSY.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

And Christie went. She had done her best, and the food certainly did not look uninviting, but the lady had worked herself by this time into such a state of disgust, that I think it would have been very hard for her to be good.

She gave one disdainful glance at the ragged edges of the piece of table cloth, then shook her head: "No, thank you. I am not reduced to that state yet."

Then, seeing the flaming color in Christie's cheeks, she seemed to struggle to make herself behave better.

"I'm not afraid of you, child," she said, "you look neat, I am sure; but after seeing the hands and hair of the girl who brought the basket, I could not eat a mouthful."

Not a word said Christie. She carried her bit of table cloth back, and laid it on the seat, covering the food from the dust; her eyes, meantime, swimming with tears.

"How long does it take people to starve?" Wells asked fiercely of the old gentleman who was in the act of biting a huge piece of ham.

Evidently he understood Wells' meaning, and smiled. But Christie could not smile.

Baby, meantime, was in rollicking humor. Apparently he had resolved that his mother was not worthy of any more tears, or frettings, and he kept one pretty arm around Christie's neck, and ate seed cakes, and drank milk, with delight.

On the whole, it was a very nice dinner, and the different people who came from the other car, and shared it, all agreed that "Sarah Ann" ought to have a vote of thanks.

"I'll tell you what will be better than that," said the old gentleman, putting his hand into his pocket; "at least we can add it to the thanks, and make her happy. Let us take up a nice little collection for her to get herself a pair of rubber boots to climb through the mud in,"—and he dropped a shining gold bit into Christie's hand.

"And a comb to comb her hair with," added Wells as he laid a silver dollar beside the gold piece; "you advise her to buy one, Christie, that's a good girl."

The rough-looking men seemed equally pleased with the idea, and dropped their fifty cent pieces into the eager little hand, and the pale young man actually added another gold piece.

I wish you could have seen Christie's eyes, as her hand began to grow full! It seemed to her that she was never so happy in her life. It was so splendid to give people things; she had never had that pleasure before.

"I haven't any money," she

said softly to Wells, "but I am so glad that the rest of you have; and it is so nice in you to let me give it to her. Just think what a lot of nice things it will buy her! I know they are poor by the looks of the kitchen. I think it was real good in them to send us dinner."

"So it was; and it was real good of the woman to be such an excellent cook. I haven't had a better dinner in a long time; but I say, Christie, what are you saving that choice bit in the cloth for? You don't mean to relent and let the baby have it after all!"

"No," said Christie laughing, "baby must be content with seed cakes, and milk. I know his mamma does not let him eat ham, and I am not going to run the risk; but I thought I would keep that, for a little while."

The remainder of the milk had been carefully poured into what Wells called "the company pitcher," to be kept for baby; and Christie went with basket and money out to Sarah Ann on the platform.

Just as she came back with her eyes full of the story of the girl's dumb surprise, a lady was opening the opposite door and coming down the aisle. A middle-aged lady, elegantly dressed, and with a placid smile on her face.

"I thought I must come and look after the little fairy who so kindly furnished us with a dinner," she said brightly. "Is this the one? My child, you did not know I had some of your dinner, did you? but that patient brakesman out there, shared his slice of bread and ham with me, and told me the whole story. I want to see the baby. If I had heard of him before, I should have come and tried to help. Yes; I have been sitting in that next car all the time; but I was so stupid as to go to sleep and lose most of the excitements. Why, Wells Burton! I wonder if you are here?"

"Yes'm," said Wells briskly, "I'm here, Mrs. Haviland; but I did not know that you were." Did you go to sleep before the accident and the stopping of the train?"

"No, indeed! I stayed awake for that excitement, and heard all about it, and the forethought of this little woman, but you see I did not know it was you, and there seemed to be so many crowding in, and nothing to do but stare, that I thought I wouldn't join them. And so it was you who were hurt? My dear boy, how distressed your mother must be!" exclaimed Mrs. Haviland, bending over him pityingly. "Where is she, and all the rest of them, and how is it that you are spending Christmas day on the cars?"

There seemed no end to the questions that the handsome lady had to ask. Christie meantime,

was engaged in watching the "Seaside library woman," as I am afraid that the lady will have to be called for the rest of the story. The moment that the stranger had exclaimed:

"Why, Wells Burton!" the lady had given a sudden surprised start, and her face had flushed deeply. At least she knew the name, if she did not the boy, and for some reason, the knowledge seemed to disturb her.

Just then the stranger turned in her direction, and bowed slightly as some people do when they know persons a little bit, and do not care to know them any better.

Wells noticed the bow, and was ready with questions.

"Mrs. Haviland, I wonder if you are acquainted with that creature. Who is she?"

"My dear boy, have you been travelling with her all day, without knowing who she is? Did you ever hear of a person by the name of Henrietta Westville?"

"I should think I had! You don't say that she is the one!"

"That is her name, my boy."

"Well! I wonder that I had not thought of it for myself. The name fits her character precisely, of all the cantankerous, disgusting creatures that I ever saw, she!"

"Softly, softly, my dear Wells, what would 'mother' say to such language as that?"

"I don't care," declared Wells; "the language doesn't begin with the subject. Mamma is reasonable. She knows that a fellow has to boil over once in a while. Why, Mrs. Haviland, you never heard the like of the way in which she has conducted herself to-day."

And then Wells launched out in a description of the conduct of the "Seaside library creature," and Christie took the sleepy baby to a seat on the other side of the car to soothe him to sleep, and to wonder who this lady was, and why Wells cared because the young woman was named Henrietta Westville, and what he was telling the stranger about herself, for at this moment she overheard her own name.

CHAPTER IX.

The baby went to sleep, and the strange lady continued talking with Wells. So Christie, feeling a little lonely after so much excitement, looked about her for amusement, and discovered that the nice old gentleman was motioning to her.

"Come and take care of me a while, little woman," he said, making room for her. "Between us we can catch the baby before he makes up his mind to roll away. You must be tired looking after him. I wish his mother knew what good care he had."

"I am used to it," exclaimed Christie. "I take a great deal of care of our baby; but I am sorry for his mother!"

Christie meant the mother of the baby on the cars, not the baby at home.

The old gentleman understood her.

"It is a bad business, he said cheerly; "but not so bad but it might have been worse. Suppose, for instance, you had not been on the cars, what would baby have done then? For that matter, what would any of us have done without our dinner? That was an excellent dinner you got up for us. How have you enjoyed the day, on the whole?"

"Why," said Christie laughing, "I haven't had time to think. It isn't a bit such a day as I had planned."

"I imagine not. Mine isn't, I know. Let us hear what you had planned, and see if your expectations were any like mine."

"Oh, no!" said Christie; "they couldn't be! Why, in the first place, I was to take my first ride on the cars. Well, I have done that, though we didn't ride very far before we stopped."

"Just so; and we seem to find it hard work to get on again. I wonder if this is your first ride! Well, well! you will not be likely to forget it, will you? And where were you going?"

"Why, I expected to spend all this day at my uncle Daniel's in the city! I have never been there, you know, and he lives in a nice house, and has a great many things that I wanted to see."

"Do you mind telling me the thing that you wanted to see the most?"

A shy little blush came into Christie's face, and she drooped her head.

"It was very silly, I suppose, but I wanted to see the carpet in the parlor. It is what they call Brussels, and has ferns all over it, so natural that mother says you could most pick them; and some berries like what mother used to gather in the woods where she lived, away off East. I never saw such a carpet, and I can't think what it would be like. It doesn't seem to me that they could make natural-looking ferns out of threads of wool; and I wanted to see if I should think so. Then she has pretty furniture in her room, all painted in flowers—roses, you know—and pansies, and oh! a great many flowers and vines, just lovely! I never saw anything like that, either; and I couldn't think how they would look."

The old gentleman got out his only remaining handkerchief, and drew it across his mouth, to hide his smile that he did not want Christie to see; and then drew it across his eyes, for something in her voice seemed to make the tears start.

"I understand," he said, his voice full of kindly sympathy; "and so these were the things that you most wanted to see?"