

Uncle Tom's Department.

MY DEAR NIECES AND NEPHEWS:—

Our sorrow for the loss of John G. Whittier, the Quaker poet, has not subsided when we are again called on to lose a friend whose lines each one of us have enjoyed, and whom we have claimed as partly our own. The Poet Laureate, Alfred Tennyson, lies to-day in the poet's corner of Westminster Abbey, quietly resting amid England's great ones. We can but wait for a glance at the last of this greatest poet of England's present time. "He lay," we are told "through the last night silent, the autumn moonlight all across his bed, the wind whistling in his manor oaks, and his left hand, that blameless hand, resting upon the open pages of 'Cymbeline.'" For sixty years, for it was then he wrote 'The Lady of Shallot,' 'Oenone' and 'The Palace of Art,' he has been writing for us, and in the fulness of his fame, in a ripe old age, he has passed quietly away. His coffin was covered with the flag of his country, whose true son he was and ever wrote for, and whose honor he ever upheld. Upon the flag lay a wreath of laurel leaves sent by the Queen. During the service the choir sang 'Crossing the Bar' and 'The Silent Voices,' a poem he dedicated to his wife only ten days before his death. Among the contributions of poetry sent in for my nieces and nephews, I shall expect to find these beautiful ones. The greatest living Englishmen laid him to rest—a fitting tribute to his greatness; but one which he himself would value far more, and in this we can include Whittier also, can be rendered by us all, the tribute to a pure, kindly, benevolent life, righteous in thought, word and deed. The face of each, from pictures of them, has long been familiar, so are many of their lines to you, my nieces and nephews. Who does not know 'Maude Muller' and 'Snow Bound?' Who of you do not know the ballad of the 'Revenge,' 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'Ode on the Death of Wellington?' even if you have not yet read 'Enoch Arden,' 'Locksley Hall,' or 'In Memoriam,' than which, perhaps in the language is no better interpretation of the real sorrow of a true friend.

There is much to look forward to with pleasure during the coming winter if you undertake to read what either of these poets have written, a winter's reading which will widen your knowledge, give you grand scope for thought, and which will open for you fresh interests in the "primrose path of literature."

Were Uncle Tom around the latter end of this month, and able to suggest to fathers and mothers something about Christmas presents, I rather think a copy of these books would grace the little library of each of my young relatives. You will think my letter sad, I fear, beginning with two who "have crossed the Bar," and ending up with this being the last letter of this year. Yes, the very last. Some, whose faces I saw in thought as I wrote the first letters, are missing, and some wee faces, who a year ago took no interest, are peeping in. The years come and the years go, and we grow from babyhood to be old men and women. The friends you have now in a few years will be changed, and each of you will fill a niche being made ready for you somewhere.

"The work of the world is done by few,
God asks that a part be done by you."

Each of us can say, as we bid dear old '92
adieu:—

"I see not a step before me,
As I tread on another year;
But the past is in God's keeping,
The future His mercy shall clear;
And what looks dark in the distance
May brighten as I draw near."

So I go on, not knowing;
I would not if I might;
I would rather walk in the dark with God
Than go alone in the light.
I would rather walk with Him by faith
Than walk alone by sight."

Or in Whittier's words:—

"I know not where His islets lift
Their fabled palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

Let us read the last night of this year, in addition to the "May Queen," Tennyson's "Death of the Old Year," and may your Christmas, my children, be a very happy one, and a glad entering on the new year of 1893.

UNCLE TOM.

P.S.—Our Poets' Corner still proves a source of interest, but I am sure there are still a great number of my nieces and nephews who have not sent in their favorite poems. Let me have as many as possible for next month. Make your selection from the writings of any poet you choose, and let me have them not later than the 20th December.

P.S.—This month closes our puzzle competition for 1892, but I cannot give names of all the prize-winners before the 1st January, or until I have received the answers to the December puzzles. I hope you have all enjoyed this department, and will continue to assist me during 1893. New rules, new prizes and new attractions will be given in our next issue.

Arthur's Christmas Letter.

ANNIE J. HOLLAND IN HOUSEHOLD MONTHLY.

Arthur seated himself upon the floor, in a corner of the room farthest from his mother; he wrinkled his eye-brows, puckered his mouth, and cramping his little fingers around a stubby lead pencil began to write; and this is what he wrote:—

Dear Santa Claus: Please don't forget to fill my stocking. An Id like A Sled an a par of skates. An please giv MOThEr the vKry nicEst thing you goT. We Live on French strett, First ChlmBly down 2 FLighTs.

ARTHUR HILL.

He stretched out his little numb fingers, with a sigh of relief; for printing was hard work for Arthur's chubby fist. Then he glanced furtively over his shoulder, to make sure his mother was not looking—but no; stitch, stitch, stitch her needle went through the heavy coat, and she did not once look up. So he folded the precious letter in a painstaking manner, and sealed it in the envelope addressed:

MR. SANTY CLAWS,

and stuffing it into his little pocket—regardless of opposition on the part of letter or pocket—went softly out of the room; but his quiet movements ended on the landing just outside, and he tore down the stairs and through the streets to the post office.

Perhaps the thought that there were but two days before Christmas, and the consequent fear that the gentle reminder might not reach Santa Claus in time, gave the deer-like fleetness to his sturdy little feet.

There was no one in the office, so he walked boldly up and dropped the letter through the slot, and watched it sliding down the inclined plane into the receiving box. Then, with a fear of being detected he ran out of the office, and with his hands in his pockets, scampered home.

Arthur's letter lay among the others for a half hour or so, and then a clerk began assorting them for the mails.

"Here's a good one!" and he laughed heartily as he held up the crumpled envelope.

"Mr. Santa Claus!" and he laughed again, in company with two or three clerks who had gathered around him.

Just then the door opened and the postmaster came in.

The clerk held up the letter, "Mr. Santa Claus—address not given! Are you acquainted with the gentleman's residence?"

Mr. Morris took the envelope and laughed also, as he glanced at it, and was about to throw it down, when a sudden vision of four little maids, with an unquestioning faith in Santa Claus, rose before him.

"Perhaps I can find the gentleman," he said, with a twinkle in his kind blue eyes; and putting the envelope into his pocket he walked away.

It was Christmas Eve. There had been a heavy snow storm the day before, and it had cleared off very cold. The people were muffled in furs to their eyes—if they had the furs—and hurried along over the crisp snow, which sang

sharp little songs under their feet. The rude wind wrestled with them at the street corners, making the gentlemen catch wildly at their hats, and fluttering ribbons and veils in the faces of the ladies.

Jack Frost played coarse practical jokes upon everybody and everything within his reach, so that the market boys felt obliged to run with the turkeys and turnips, blowing the while upon their aching fingers, or rubbing their smarting ears.

The newsboys, with ear muffers, and caps pulled closely down, held their papers under their arms and their hands in their pockets, and thrashed one foot against the other, while they called in cold voices to the passer-by, "Paper, sir? paper!"

The heavens were studded with gleaming stars, which blinked merrily down upon the hurrying throng; and through uncurtained windows were glimpses of gay Christmas trees with happy children dancing around them, and smiling fathers and mothers looking on.

Holly wreaths hung in profusion, and festoons of evergreen and mistletoe adorned the walls; and over these happy scenes played the flickering light of the "yule" log's glow.

The church bells rang merrily, and the organ's deep note peeled forth upon the night winds; lights streamed from the windows and through the doors as they swung to and fro, while softly on the listening ear stole the sound of voices singing of "Peace on earth, good-will toward men."

But the peace and warmth and glow had not reached "French street, first chimney, two flights down."

There was a little fire—just enough to give it the name—but its name seemed an empty title.

The curtain was not drawn—what need of that? since the frost had worked so thick a screen that not even a loving star could peep in with a happy Christmas greeting. Mrs. Hill, with an old shawl over her shoulders, sat close to the table, with a dim kerosene lamp beside her.

She was blue with the cold, and her fingers so stiff that the needle went laboriously through the heavy seam. Her tired eyes filled with tears now and again, but she dashed them away—every minute was precious; for if the coat was not finished to-night, and taken back—there was a sorry outlook for to-morrow. And the thought of the empty larder and coal-hod nerved her to frantic efforts at faster working; and when the clock outside told the hour of eight, it sent a colder thrill through her frame.

Arthur, in spite of the cold, had pulled off one of his stockings, and was looking ruefully at a large hole in the toe.

"Look!" he said, holding it up before his mother, with a comical expression on his little mottled face.

"O Arthur, how you do wear your stockings out! I mended them all up last Saturday night."

"But it came right through again!" and Arthur glanced from the yawning stocking toe to his mother's tired face, then back again to the stocking.

"Do you s'pose the presents will come through?"

"No, I am afraid they won't," she said, half-bitterly.

"But I don't want 'em to!" and he looked with a perplexed expression at his mother, who was afraid his presents wouldn't come through.

He examined the hole again, taking its dimensions by thrusting three fingers through it and stretching them apart.

Yes, there was no doubt a good-sized toy could squeeze through that hole.

"Can you mend it, mother?"

"O Arthur, don't ask me to do anything!" she answered fretfully, and Arthur moved away a little; for never in his life before had he heard his mother speak like that.

But the next instant she reached out her arm, and snatched him passionately to her heart.

"Arthur, dear, mother is sorry that she spoke like that to you," and she kissed the little cold face, while her tears—so near the surface—rained over her own face and his. "I am tired, but that is no reason for my speaking crossly to you;