

LITTLE FOLKS

The Christmas Shopping.

(Christina Mackenzie, in 'The Child's Companion'.)

It was just the right kind of Christmas weather, so everybody was saying—at least, people who were well and had good homes and warm clothes said so, but for those who were ragged and hungry it was quite a different matter.

The ground was frozen hard, and the hoar-frost had covered the hedges and trees with white feathery spray. Jack Frost had been busy all night decorating the window-panes with forests of wonderful trees and flowers; but, alas! his work was all in vain, for when the fires were lighted and the room grew warm they all disappeared.

Little Archie and Norah Martin buttoned up their winter coats and put on their warm gloves, ready to go with Auntie Jean to do some shopping for mother.

If their aunt had been willing, the children would have spent at least an hour looking in the toy-shop windows.

'They were just like fairy-land,' Norah said.

Dolls dressed like fairy-queens there and pretty houses for them to live in, animals for the farm-yards, horses and carts just fit for a fairy-village, and numerous other toys it would take far too long to describe.

When they reached the stores there was such a display of candied fruits, nuts, oranges, and crackers in boxes, with wreaths of glistening holly about them, and such an endless variety of iced cakes and biscuits, that it was difficult to know which to buy among so many.

Now of all the nice things in the shop, Norah and Archie liked chocolates the best of all, and auntie had promised to buy them each a shilling box for a Christmas present.

On the counter the grocer had arranged the prettiest boxes of fancy sweets and chocolates, tier above tier, and put a huge bunch of mistletoe at the top.

While Miss Martin was giving her order, the children stood talking together, trying to make up their minds which to choose. Presently their voices hushed almost to a whisper and the little faces looked unusually grave, as if they were discussing some very serious question.



HURRAH FOR THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

'You ask her now, Norah,' the little boy said.

'No—you!' Norah replied.

Archie shook his curly head. 'You're older than I am, so you ought to do it.'

After a little hesitation, Norah turned to Miss Martin, and, pointing to a bowl of mixed sweets standing near, she asked—

'Please, auntie, if we don't have our chocolates, how many of these sweets can we buy?'

'Do you think you would like those better?' Miss Martin asked in surprise.

'No auntie,' the children replied.

'Then why do you want them?'

That was just the question they were afraid would be asked. For they had heard in the sermon on Sunday, and it was plain enough for their little hearts to understand, that when we do good we should do it as quietly as possible, and not want everybody to know.

Norah's face grew very red as she explained. 'If you will let us, Auntie, Archie and I would like to send our two shillings to the Ragged School Christmas-tree, and we

thought these would be better than chocolates.'

Miss Martin was very glad indeed to see the children so unselfish; she willingly gave her consent, and told the shopman to put an extra shilling's worth into the parcel.

Santa Claus did not put any chocolates in Archie and Norah's stockings as he might have done. But when the postman brought the letters, there were among them a little note from the secretary of the Ragged School, thanking them for their kind thought for the little ones less fortunate than themselves, and inviting them to go to see the presents given away at the treat on Boxing Day.

Of course they accepted the invitation, and thoroughly enjoyed their visit, though it was the noisiest Christmas party they had ever been to.

They said it was the best Christmas-time they had ever spent, and when mother saw their bright happy faces, she was glad to know that her children had begun to learn that true happiness comes, not in trying to please ourselves, but in giving joy to others.