



See what Santa Claus has brought me!

HOW THE CHILDREN KEPT CHRISTMAS.

Mamma Todd was down in the kitchen busily engaged in making cookies for Christmas, and the four little Toddlies, as they called themselves, were very busy watching her, smacking their lips in anticipation over the plum-pudding, and longing for the time to come, when, like little Jack Horner, they could "put in their thumb and pull out a plum" from the big fruit cake.

Ethel, as she was the oldest, was promoted to the dignity of being mamma's assistant, and just now, half eclipsed by a big gingham apron, with her sleeves rolled up above her dimpled elbows, she was the very picture of a little housekeeper.

The egg-beater flew swiftly under the nimble fingers till the white foam grew firm and smooth.

"There, those eggs are beaten enough, aren't they, mamma?" she asked, turning the dish upside down to the great alarm of the other little Toddlies, who always expected to see the egg fall on the floor, holding their breaths until the dish was restored to its normal condition.

"Yes, dear, that will do, nicely," answered mamma, "now you may pick over these currants for me."

"Oh, mamma, isn't there something that I can do?" asked Harry, watching Ethel with envious eyes.

"Me, too!" chimed in May, eagerly.

"Bertie wants to help. Let Bertie help," cried the little four-year-old pet of the house.

Mamma laughed.

"Too many cooks spoil the broth," you know," she answered. "But since you are so anxious to help I will try to find something for you to do in a minute. Now open your mouth and shut your eyes and I'll give you something to make you wise," and she popped a plump raisin into each of the wide open mouths.

"That tastes like Christmas. Mamma I think everything tastes so much better at Christmas than at any other time," said Harry.

"I wish Christmas came two or three times a year," said May. "We always have such lovely times. I don't know which I like best, hanging up our stockings or the Christmas tree, they are both such fun."

"I wonder if everybody has as nice a time as we do," said Ethel, thoughtfully.

"I am afraid there are a great many little children who don't know anything about Christmas happiness," mamma answered. "I know one family of children that don't expect to have any Christmas presents, or even enough to eat of very plain food."

"Why, mamma, who are they?" asked Ethel, in surprise.

"You have all seen the little girl about May's age, who comes around with a basket every day, begging for something to eat. Yesterday, when she came to the door she looked so cold that I told her to come in and sit down by the fire a little while, and get warm. I saw that her eyes were red and swollen, as if she had been crying, and after a while she told me that her mother was sick, and she was afraid she was going to die. I gave her something to take home

with her, and in the afternoon I went around to see her."

"Where does she live?" asked Harry.

"She lives in a little tumble-down house by the bridge," answered mamma. "I found her mother, who is very sick, lying on a bed made of old clothes, near the fire, and the little children huddled around her, trying to warm themselves by the feeble blaze of a few sticks which smouldered in the fireplace. She has been sick for a long time now, she told me, and had to sell all her furniture, piece by piece, and at last when it was all gone, Maggie had to take a basket and go out to beg for enough to keep them from starving. I don't think those little children are looking forward to Christmas as eagerly as you are."

"How dreadful it must be to be so poor," exclaimed May, her bright face saddened at the thought of suffering.

"Mamma, didn't you do something to make them more comfortable?"

"I did all that I could," answered mamma, "and I think the poor woman is more comfortable now. I thought of a plan as I came home, though, which may give the children a happy Christmas for the first time perhaps in their lives. Children, why do you enjoy Christmas so much?"

"Because we get so many presents," answered Harry, wondering why mamma asked them such a strange question.

"Because we have a beautiful Christmas tree and so many goodies," May said with a loving glance at the row of pies on the table.

"Cause Santa Claus comes," put in Bertie, eagerly.

"Yes; I think your great pleasure has been in receiving presents," answered mamma. "Now I have been wondering if you wouldn't enjoy a Christmas equally well if you found your pleasure in giving instead."

"Why, mamma, what do you mean?" asked Harry, in bewilderment. "Not get any presents at all?"

"I thought that perhaps you would enjoy giving these poor little children presents more than receiving them yourselves. Papa and I talked it over last night, and he told me just what presents he meant to get each of you, and said that if you would rather have the money instead, and spend it on this poor family, he would be very glad to give it to you."

Four bright little faces lengthened slowly out, and nobody said anything for a few moments. They were all generous, warm-hearted children, but it seemed like a very hard thing to give up their presents to make some children, only one of whom they had ever seen, happy instead.

"Wouldn't we have a tree or any presents or anything?" asked Harry, sadly.

"Don't look so heart-broken about it, dear," said mamma, cheerily, smiling at his long face. "You can do just as you like about it, you know. You can have your presents and tree, just as you usually do, if you want to."

"Which would you do if you were in our places, mamma?" asked May.

"I don't want to advise you, dear," answered mamma. "I want to leave it entirely to yourselves. Now, Harry, here is

something you can do, if you want to help," and she put a chopping-bowl before him.

Harry worked in silence for a while, then he looked up with a brighter face.

"Well, mamma, I will give up my presents if the rest will," he said, bravely. "I shouldn't enjoy them half as much, anyway, since you told us about those poor children. It would just spoil everything for me to remember them."

"I will give up mine too," said May, with sudden resolution.

"And so will I," added Ethel.

"See here, Bertie," she went on, catching her little sister up in her arms, "wouldn't you be willing to have Santa Claus go to see a poor little girl who hasn't got any Christmas, instead of coming to see you?"

"No! No! Me want Santa Claus to come and fill my 'tocking," answered Bertie, shaking her head wilfully.

"Oh, mamma, she is too little to understand," said Ethel. "What shall we do with her? Don't you want to be a generous little girl, Bertie darling?"

But Bertie kept on shaking her golden head.

"Me want Santa Claus," was all Ethel could induce her to say.

"Well, we will have to get along without her share then," said Ethel. "Now, mamma, won't you please tell us how much money we will have to spend for Christmas?"

"Papa said that he had intended to spend about twenty-five dollars on your presents, and if you decided to give them up you could have that amount to spend."

"Twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed Ethel.

"We can get lots of things with that, can't we, mamma. Let's get some paper and a pencil, Harry, and make out a list of what we are got to get. What have they got now, mamma?"

"Nothing at all, dear, except a few old dishes and a bed I sent them yesterday."

The four heads bent over the paper, Bertie interested because the others were, all talking eagerly.

Mamma smiled quietly to herself as she heard some of the items proposed.

"A cook-stove, put that down, Harry," May exclaimed.

"They want a bed-room set, too," said Harry, with the air of having suggested an invaluable idea.

"Guess you don't know how much bed-room sets cost," said May. "It would take more than all the money we have got to buy that."

"Would it?" said Harry, in surprise. "Well, we can leave that out, I suppose."

The children filled up both sides of the paper with a list of things that they considered absolutely indispensable to the poor woman's comfort, and Harry was about to go upstairs for another sheet when mamma suggested that twenty-five dollars wouldn't buy everything that they could think of, and that they would therefore have to leave out a great many of the things that they had thought of.

The next two days were very busy ones to the three older children. They made a great many errands to the sick woman's house, laden with little dainties from mamma, that they might see what things were really the most necessary, and I think they were far happier in looking forward to her surprise and pleasure than they would have been in looking forward to a beautiful tree and presents for themselves.

The day before Christmas the children were up almost at day-break so anxious were they to carry out their plans. A neighbor of the poor woman's, whom they had let into their secret, promised to bring both the mother and children over to her house early in the afternoon and keep them till evening, so they would have a chance to prepare their surprise.

The morning seemed very long to the eager children, and they could scarcely restrain their impatience.

After they once got fairly at work it was wonderful to see how they changed, the appearance of everything.

If they had been fairies the changes they made could hardly have been greater.

Ethel swept the floor neatly, and then Harry put down a large square of warm carpet, faded, it is true, and mended in one or two places, but still very comfortable. Then he put up an old stove which Aunt Jennie had found in her lumber-room and given him.

May had fastened a curtain at the win-