

The servants were now home from their work, so the conversation turned on general topics.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS AT HOME.

"Hark! where it rolls!—It thrills the sons of art, and binds the knee;
He comes, who blesses the wedding feast
In Cana of Galilee."

When the poor wandering minstrel that wrote "*Home, sweet home*" rambled about the streets of London, without a roof to cover him, and heard the sad voices of wretched ballad singers chanting "*Home, sweet home!*" how his desolation must have crushed his mind. The world was before him, but no home for him that sang of a happy home. Verily, the tender sensibilities of fine minds are often tried with a vengeance. He who felt most keenly the charms of home and domestic bliss could never call them his own.

"Home, sweet home!" How little do we think of home when intoxicated with the gaieties of fashionable life; yet home is the haven of rest, where the weary spirit seeks repose, where the affections bloom and blossom. If assailed with bodily or mental trouble, where can we turn for pure sympathy but to home. You may have wealth, and wealth without sympathy, but not without admiration and envy. Admiration will not make us happy without love and sympathy; and where will these be found in all their depth and purity, but at home. Home is the union of all those social ties that bind brothers and sisters, parents and children, in one holy bond—a holy bond of mutual love and brotherhood.

A man of a loving heart, with good moral resolution, and the genius of moral discipline, can make home a paradise indeed. Home is woman's province; the sphere of her love and duty; it is her kingdom; and how grandly does a wise woman rule her little empire. Her words are words of peace and love. She rules her household with a moral influence that delights the heart of her husband.

Young men are too apt to be taken with the allurements of society; still these charms possess nothing so endearing as the sweets of domestic affection. These expand the heart with the truest sensations. What artificial enjoyments can compare to the greeting smile of a fond wife or the prattling of pretty babes. There is no charm of society so dear as that arising from the confidence and mutual thoughts and plans fostered and designed by man and wife.

He who is worthy of love, and can appreciate all its fervor and purity, will find them in the endearments of his wife and children. Man seldom appreciates the gushing warmth of woman's affections. There is a purity in her devotion that our

rougher natures cannot well appreciate; we seldom comprehend the depth of her love, the purity of her intense affections.

Such a home as I have attempted to describe was Mr. O'Donnell's. It never witnessed those little domestic scenes, those family broils, that generally alienate the affections and deprive home of its truest blessings. Mr. O'Donnell was a kind, affectionate father, but not a too indulgent one. As for Mrs. O'Donnell, home, indeed, was her little kingdom, which she ruled with all the moral government of a well-ordered state.

Her family sat around their little table, quiet, cheerful, and friendly; without an unkind word; without a frown to mar their happiness.

In such a home as this how happy must our friend, Willy Shea, find himself, even if there were not the sacred tie of love to bind him to it.

Alice Maher, too, had come over to spend the Christmas at Glen Cottage.

Kate was visiting at her uncle's, and when returning home got leave for Alice to accompany her.

It was Christmas-day—that day of high festival—and there were merry hearts in cabin and hall. The village bells were pealing forth in merry tones; and seemed to say: "Christmas comes but once a year, and when it comes it brings good cheer." The bells were pealing, and happy faces crowded along the village way. Men and women and children throng the way, for the merry bells seemed to grow joyous, and clang out—"It's Christmas-day, Christmas-day." And they chimed and they chimed, until merry hearts took up the burden of their song, and wished each other a happy Christmas.

"A merry Christmas" greeted our friends as they proceeded to the village Mass.

"Ay, a merry Christmas, and a great many, too,"—for Mr. O'Donnell and his family were beloved by the poor.

How often did he get some friend, for form sake, to secure a poor man in his bank, for his rent, to keep the house over him. For form sake, I say, for well did that friend know, that if the poor man failed, he would not be called on to pay. How often did his son, Frank, give from his scanty means to make up the widow's rent, and his wife and daughter pay visits of charity and mercy to the sick and needy. It is no wonder, therefore, that they were greeted from every side with, "a merry Christmas, and a great many, too!"

Why was the sublime feeling of adoration purer, warmer, and more ardent to-day than any other? To-day, for it was Christmas-day; it took its inspiration from that pious and mystic ecstasy created by the solemn and awe-inspiring belief, that we are commemorating the birth of a God