

the popinjays! No, I repeat it. There's not one thing will be given to any one in the house from outside that they need or want, or have a right to have at the price it is going to cost them in buying corresponding things. It's unwarrantable! It's unjustifiable! It's a part of the general corruption that's settling like a mildew on everything in these days of Sodom and Gomorrah over again! Six hundred, eight hundred, perhaps a thousand dollars, add it together, wasted in this house, torn up, tossed to the winds, for things we could do without and never know it, when here are people without clothes, without blankets, without food, without roofs; full of suffering, driven to crime and shame, and the suffering and the sin all to be prevented by the money we throw away! It's enough to bring down wrath upon our heads! It makes me shiver to think of it! It's selfishness, cupidity, greed, multiplied by vanity, and carried to the highest power! It is enough to give satisfaction to the powers of darkness and make such powers, if there were none now. It's—

'Enough!' said Will. 'It's enough to prove that the Garstons are idiots and malefactors from Wayback, and deserve to be in Dante's inner circle for all time to come, really so bad that it's no matter what they do now, for there's no power in the universe can cleanse them from the original stain of having given away more than they ever received!'

'People,' said Fred, 'who are always going about tearing a passion to tatters.'

'And who appear to think,' said Sophy, 'that it's no matter at all about the comfort of their own daughters so long as other people's daughters are comfortable; for I'm sure I shall be distressed to death if I cannot make the Christmas gifts I always do.'

And then Mr. Garston sat down and brushed all his gray hair erect, and picked up his paper and looked round a little anxiously, and they all laughed.

'But, seriously,' said the mother, 'I do think that the way we celebrate holy festival days by stimulating acquisitiveness, the love of acquiring and possessing and hoarding, is a great mistake. And we are generally so worn out as to be fit for nothing after the week's shopping, and the condition to which we reduce the poor shop girls is a barbarity, equal to anything in the old Roman circus, and—'

'And, in short, mamma,' said Marion, 'you know just the place where you'd like to bestow your money, and give no one of us any gift at all.'

'Yes, I do,' said her mother.

'And have the rest of us add ours,' said Sophy.

'It wouldn't do you a bit of harm.'

'And do somebody else a lot of good,' cried little Jennie, coming to the rescue, with an idea that they were badgering her dear mamma. 'I will give mine, mamma, dear, and all that papa was going to give me, too. I think—I think,' she said, with authority, 'that papa is perfectly right.'

'Bravo, Jenny!' cried Fred, 'And I'll not be outdone. Mother, take mine—all that the governor will give me.'

'You graceless scamp,' said his father.

'My word's as good as my bond,' said Fred. 'There it is, planked down'; and he tossed a hundred-dollar bill into his mother's lap.

'I don't carry money round in that loose way,' said Will.

'Nor I, frequently. Don't have it to

carry. But I had it ready to hand to the 'Mater,' to get my presents for me—she always does. Now I shall walk in the governor's tracks, and give no one so much as a card.'

'In the house, that is,' said Marion, significantly.

'Much the easiest way of settling the whole thing,' said Will, ignoring her. 'I'll give you the cheque for mine to-morrow, mammy. There's at least fifteen or eighteen I should have to make. I couldn't get out of it at less than a round hundred.'

'Oh, oh, oh!' said Marion. 'We're all in for it! And it's just going to strip Christmas of every bit of its jollity, and not even leave anything over for New Year's!'

'I don't know,' said Sophy, 'I suppose we might get up surprises for each other that might be pleasant without the presents. I don't know—'

'Let us try,' said her father.

'But, Papa!' said Johnny, who had begun in blank dismay to have a realizing sense that theories were all very well till facts applied them. 'I must have my skates!'

'What's the matter with the skates you have now?'

'Oh, they're all right!' said Fred,

'They're not all right!' retorted the indignant Johnny. 'Any more than your—'

'Well, Johnny,' said his father, 'of course you can do as you choose; you can have the skates or you can join the society for the restoration of Christmas to its original meaning.'

'I — want the skates,' said Johnny, hanging his lip. 'I suppose you'll be going without a turkey for dinner next, so as to give that away, too, in your fine society.'

'It's no affair of yours,' said Jenny, 'if we do; if you don't belong to the society.'

'I belong to the turkey society,' said Johnny.

'So you do. There, there,' said his mother; 'and I shouldn't wonder if there were turkey and oysters and soup and all the rest for dinner in that society. But now about this society—do you think you will go with us or not?'

'Oh, I suppose I shall have to. I shall be ashamed to let Jen, and not. But I don't want to. And, if I do, I think I might give my own share where I please.'

'Certainly. And where is that?'

'Well,' said Johnny, deliberately, and trying to stand up his hair like his father's; 'I daresay he needs it, and all that. But he's got a better pair of skates than mine to-day, and that's a fact!'

'Who has?' said Marion.

'Oh, never mind the skates,' cried Jenny.

'That's just like a girl! Of course, never mind the skates, when you can't make a stroke with one foot yet yourself. I do mind them. And if I'm willing to give my money to Charlie Horling, so's he can get a stock of stationery and set up for himself, it isn't because I don't mind the skates, for I do mind them; and don't you forget it, miss!' roared Johnny.

'Well, well, well,' said his mother. 'And who is Charlie Horling?'

'Oh, he's one of the fellers. A real good one, too. But his father died. And I guess they're as poor as sixty. At any rate, he isn't going to school any more, and he's got to go and earn his living, and take care of his mother. And he said to me once, when we were talking, and I was telling him that I meant to go out on the plains and be a cow-boy, that what he

wanted was fifty dollars to get a stock of stationery, and he'd soon be able to take care of his mother. His mother and he live at a cousin's, and the cousin is poor and has got to go into a shop, and doesn't want to, and wouldn't have to if she could rent the rooms that he and his mother have. And he and his mother would like to have a home of their own if it was ever so small,' he says.

'Poor little soul!'

'He shall have it!'

'Yes, he shall!' said Johnny, proudly, with an air of no thanks to anybody; and he put his hands in his pockets, and strutted about the room then like a man who meant business. 'For what you are going to give me and Jen, and what we've got anyway, will make most fifty dollars, and that's all he wants. And now,' said Johnny, 'I should like to know what the rest of you propose to do?'

'Well,' said Sophy, 'if we must we must, And I imagine that Marion's and mine together would maintain Virginia Grey at her studies another year. They have promised her employment at the seminary where she's been, if she comes back and finishes there first. For the preceptress is going to be married sooner or later; she's engaged, anyway; and when she is, that pushes Julia De Vimes into her place and increases her salary so that she can send her brother to Amherst. But Virginia said there positively wasn't the money to be had, and she must go into a shop to help keep the family alive.'

'Dear, dear,' said Marion; 'it certainly is too hard. I suppose the most she could earn that way would be eight or nine dollars a week, and not steady in the summer, and never any better.'

'But in the seminary she would have eight hundred a year, after a little—you know she is 'belle lettres,' and all that.'

'Well,' said the father; 'that is settled. Virginia Grey—how did you happen to know her?'

'In the mission-circle.'

'Virginia Grey goes to the seminary. Now, mother.'

'I suppose you yourself were going to give us all something, father?' said the mother, anxiously.

'Oh, of course, I suppose so. "Noblesse oblige." Stand and deliver; your money or your life, and all the rest. I have had sufficient intimation in the shape of hints as to what would be becoming to Sophy, and what would be convenient for Marion—'

'Well, then, yours and mine—'

'Mine! I like that!'

'Mine after I get it, isn't it?'

'Oh, my love, I intended nothing like that. I allude simply to the preposterousness of the idea that anything is mine.'

'Yours and mine and Will's and Fred's put together,' said the mother then, 'make a sum that will pay the mortgage on the house of a person I know of, which is occasioning her the keenest anxiety.'

'How is it that you know any one in such condition as that?'

'In such condition? I'm not sure that she is not better off than I am in some ways. She doesn't have to ask for the money to make her Christmas presents.'

'Humph!'

'However, this mortgage is to be foreclosed, or something; and if she can't pay it she will lose the house and her means of livelihood with it. She has two-thirds of