

## CHOISE LITERATURE.

## THROUGH THE WINTER.

## CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

Helen rose from her chair. "Are we to go now?" she asked; "it has been so pleasant here, I had forgotten we were to do anything else."

"Yes, it has been pleasant," Dr. Waldemar repeated in a thoughtful, half-regretful tone; "but I think the little ones, Miss Helen, are quite ready for a change. I believe I shall have to go first, however. Mother, will you come with me? Margaret, when you hear the bell you may bring the others."

And with a laughing good-bye, Dr. Waldemar led his mother and grandmother away.

The rest had only a few moments to wait before the bell summoned them.

Margaret led the way, but as they came to the dining-room door she drew back.

"Ronald and Sibyl are to go in first," she said; this part of the performance is for their benefit more than ours. Philip and Fred next; now, Helen."

It was a beautiful scene—a peep into fairy land, the children thought—that the opening door revealed to them. The wall of the room was heavily festooned with the light, gray moss of our northern sea-side forests, mingled with bright clusters of wintergreen berries. The fire, shielded by its glass screen, gave out a bright glow, and sent lines across the floor, which was strewn, ankle deep, with flakes of fleecy, snowy cotton. In the middle of the room stood a large, high-backed, old-fashioned sleigh; on the high front seat, with soft fur robes tucked around him, sat a benevolent, genial-faced Santa Claus, with long, hoary locks, full, snowy beard, and white fur coat and cap. Piled on the seats, at the feet of Santa Claus, and behind and before him, hanging over the sides, and dropping from the back of the sleigh, were boxes and baskets, and packages in brown and white paper wrappings, of every size and shape, large and small, narrow and wide, thick and thin, round and square; while overhead, suspended from the back of the sleigh, and raised just above Santa Claus' head, was an immense, prettily painted cornucopia, from which, with generous hand, he drew sugar plums to pelt his observers. Before the sleigh-bells, which every now and then, as if they fully appreciated their part in the Christmas mirth, they shook with merry will.

The children stood with open eyes and mouths for a while, but when the sugar-plums began to fly at them, the spirit of wonder gave place to that of frolic, and while-bright heads dodged, willing hands were outstretched, and gay voices shouted and laughed.

Santa Claus' skill in distributing his gifts was something marvellous. The room was quite full, for there were others besides the Humphrey children present. The servants and a number of respectable but poor looking people with their children had followed Margaret and her party; and none seemed to have made a mistake; none were forgotten, or failed to receive one or more of the mysterious-looking parcels. When the wonderful sleigh was almost emptied of its contents, the fun and play were at their height. Sober-browed men, whose brown, rough hands told plainly of the struggle life was to them, stood looking on with smiles kindling in their eyes, and gentle, kind expressions creeping over their stern, grave countenances; while tired, careworn-looking women seemed to drop their burdens and grow glad and young again as they watched their children's joy, and received their own tokens of kind remembrance.

Helen was standing near one of them as Mrs. Waldemar, who was going with pleasant words from one to another, came to speak to her.

"Oh, if you only knew, ma'am," she said with a smile, that trembled with gratitude; "if you only knew what it is to us poor people to be so thought of and remembered. I think the good Christ must have put it into your heart to do this, ma'am. The presents will help us much, but it isn't that: it is the kindness and the memory of it, ma'am, that will make a great many of these wintry days warm; and it will make Christmas seem real. Seems to me it will be easier to believe in Jesus after this."

Helen's eyes filled. She could not listen to Mrs. Waldemar's gentle answer; and as she moved and brushed some one's arm she looked up to find Dr. Waldemar beside her.

The sleigh was empty, Santa Claus had disappeared, and with his usual quiet, pleasant face Dr. Waldemar looked at her. She was ashamed of her tears, and yet they would come, and slowly, one after another, as she tried to conceal them, they gathered and dropped. They were standing near a door.

"Would you like to go into the library?" the doctor asked. And before she could answer Helen found herself seated in one of the easy chairs in that quiet room.

She could not control her tears at first; all the day her heart had been full of sacred memories; of wistful yearnings; of tender, solemn gladness. The poor woman's words had touched some chord, Helen could hardly have told what, and now the tears would come.

She grew calmer presently, and looked up at Dr. Waldemar. He was standing near, gravely studying the library fire, but at the first sound of her voice he turned towards her.

"I am so sorry to do so," she said humbly; "please don't think it is because I have not been happy this evening, or have not appreciated the kindness shown me."

"No," he answered, gently, "I do not think that." Helen did not reply, and there was a brief pause: then Dr. Waldemar spoke again.

"Miss Helen, I wish—if it will not pain you—I wish you would tell me what has grieved you so much this evening."

Helen hesitated. It was a hard thing to do, but her wish to prove that nothing had really occurred to wound her made her try.

"I don't know that I can tell very clearly," she said,

"but I have been thinking of mamma all day. I have missed and wanted her so much; and then this evening something made me feel how little I knew, and I grew so hungry, so impatient to read and study. I believe I was thinking of all that when that poor woman spoke to Mrs. Waldemar; did you hear her?"

The doctor nodded gravely. "And then," Helen went on, "it came to me that I had been very selfish; that I had been thinking only of myself and my own wants; when, if I was only good, only more like Jesus, I would forget myself in remembering others, and trying to help them as Mrs. Waldemar does, and then, you must think me very foolish, but I could not help crying."

"No," Dr. Waldemar answered, gently, "I do not think you foolish, Miss Helen. Shall I tell you what I do think?"

"If you please, she said."

"I think our heavenly Father has reminded you to-night, in His own gentle, beautiful way, that it is not in what we have, or even in what we are, as judged by any of the world's standards, that we can find happiness; but it is in what we do for him and he does for us. Much that it would be very sweet for us to have and hold may have slipped out of our life, or, sadder yet, never entered it. Much that it would be pleasant for us to know, much that seems to us desirable to make us wise, may be withheld; the volumes sealed, the time denied. We may brood over our losses and wants, and wrapp'd in our sad, selfish regrets, forget that all around us lies a world full of our fellow mortals, who are sorrowing and yearning even as we are. Don't think I am chiding you, Miss Helen," Dr. Waldemar continued, very gently, "with your memories and aspirations. I sympathize more than I can say; but I would not have you lose what seems to me the most beautiful teaching of the Christmas time: that it is not in what we lose or win for ourselves, but it is in what we can do to give to others that life—the true, Christ-like life—consists."

Helen's tears had been falling while he spoke, but she looked up now and said, with a sweet, humble face: "Thank you, Dr. Waldemar; I will not forget."

"We will both remember," he said; "and, Miss Helen, we will bear in mind that in God's school, a loving, faithful scholar will seldom need the same lesson twice. I am afraid I ought not to keep you here longer: shall we join the others now?"

"O Nellie!" cried Sibyl, as Helen entered the dining-room, "I've been looking for you everywhere. Just see my new doll. Dr. Walmer, see my doll; it can open and shut its eyes, and, oh, it can cry! it can cry!"

"I don't believe there ever was a crying baby before that gave so much pleasure," Dr. Waldemar said, as he stooped down and delighted Sibyl with his admiration of her treasure. "What is its name?"

"Why, it's a baby: babies don't have names." "Don't they? You must pardon my ignorance, Miss Sibyl, but I thought they did."

"Oh, no," Sibyl explained, with an air of great wisdom: "when she grows to be a large girl like me, I shall call her Margie; but while she wears this long dress," and Sibyl looked with grave pride on the doll's pretty, embroidered robe, "she'll just be baby—my baby," and clasping the doll yet closer, the little miniature woman skipped away.

"And what are Helen's presents?" Mrs. Leighton's sweet voice asked. "What did you get, my dear?"

Helen started. "They are on the table," she said.

"And you haven't looked at them yet?" Mrs. Leighton questioned, with some amusement in her tone.

"No, ma'am; not because I wasn't glad to have them," Helen hastened to explain, "but I was thinking of other things."

"Pleasant things, I hope; but now, my dear, suppose you bring them, and let us all look at them together."

The presents were brought; and the first package opened was found to contain beautifully bound copies of *Undine*, and *Wordsworth's* poems.

Helen's colour rose as she saw the books. She did not need to be told the giver, and it was with a pretty, grateful look that she turned to Dr. Waldemar.

His smile was very pleasant.

"You will like them, I hope, Miss Helen," he said, lightly. "What is that large, queer-shaped package?"

It was a fine stereoscope with a great number of carefully chosen views.

"That is mamma's gift, Helen," Margaret said, who had just joined them. "Mamma says, when our eyes are near-sighted, it is sometimes a great help to look through glasses, and for that reason she thinks a great deal of the stereoscope, for by its means she says eyes that would otherwise be confined to home views and scenes are given a broad, far-out look over the world and its wonders. Mamma selected the views with great care, Helen; I think you will like them all. That is mine—my present, Helen," she said, as Helen took up quite a large thin package: "only I'll just tell you," in a whisper, "Guy helped me choose it. I can't talk like mamma and him, so I have commissioned my gift to preach for me," and opening the package she revealed to Helen a beautifully painted and illuminated text. Through and around the solemn, peaceful words, "Let not your heart be troubled," wound the delicate sprays and tendrils, and rare, mystic flowers of the passion-vine.

Helen looked without speaking, and Margaret, in no mind to encourage sadness, took up the last package. "This is grandma's," she said. "Grandma felt that she knew you, Helen, I had talked about you so much, and she said she was sure you would let her give you a Christmas present. Like me, you will see grandma believes in preaching to the eyes," and removing the wrappings, Margaret held up a fair, exquisitely chiselled statuette of Hope, resting against a bracket of crimson velvet. It was very beautiful. Helen could find no words to express her pleasure; and, without attempting to speak, she turned to Mrs. Leighton and gently kissed her cheek. She could have said or done nothing to please the old lady more. The kiss was affectionately returned, and from that hour Helen had a place

in Mrs. Leighton's heart, and was numbered among her dearest ones.

Dr. Waldemar had stood by, quietly looking on; now as there was the little stir in the room that always precedes the breaking up of a party, he stepped forward, and in clear pleasant tones, that at once enforced silence and attention said: "My friends, we have spent a happy evening together and I am sure we are all in our hearts wishing each other a merry Christmas; and now, before we part, let us pause a moment to give thanks to Him whose love has made this Christmas eve so holy, and to pray that his presence may abide with us evermore in our homes and lives."

Taking his Testament from his pocket he read the few verses, so wonderful for their calm, simple beauty, in which St. Luke describes the glory of the first Christmas eve. As he closed the book Margaret struck a few notes on the organ, and all joined in singing the sweet old hymn:

"There is no name so sweet on earth,  
No name so sweet in heaven,  
The name before his wondrous birth  
To Christ our Saviour given.

We love to sing around our King,  
And hail Him blessed Jesus,  
For there's no name we ever heard  
That's half so sweet as Jesus."

The sweet notes rose and swelled in the still air; lingered in soft echoes for a while, then died away in the silence; and in the hush that followed, kneeling with the little company, Dr. Waldemar offered a fervent prayer that He whose birth so many ages past had consecrated Bethlehem, might enter anew that night all their hearts; that his presence might evermore abide with them hallowing and glorifying their daily lives; ennobling work, dignifying all labour consecrating all homes, and enabling them all forevermore to sing the angel's song: Glory to God, on earth peace and good-will to men.

And thus softened, and humbled, with more charity in their thoughts of others, more gratitude in their thoughts of God, the little party broke up; and soon the lights of Waldemar cottage were darkened, and its inmates hushed in sleep.

## CHAPTER XII.—CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Only your restless heart keep still,  
And wait in cheerful hope, content  
To take whatever his gracious will  
His all-discerning love, hath sent;  
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known  
To him who chose us for his own!"

Fair and peaceful was the dawn of the Christmas morning.

"Uprose the sun and uprose Emilie."

And like her, with light hearts and glad anticipations for the day, uprose Mrs. Waldemar's young guests.

Earliest of all, perhaps, was Helen. While yet "the air was tremulous with some last starry touch," and just as the first faint hints of colour began to soften the eastern sky, she had drawn up her shade, and looked, with questioning eyes from her window, to learn the promise of the day.

Very sweet, and pure, and holy, was that early morning outlook to Helen.

Perhaps Helen's best Christmas present came to her from her morning reading of the sea and sky; and calmed and freshened by it, with a bright face and lightened heart, she joined the family in the parlour. Quickly and cheerfully passed the first hours after breakfast. For Ronald and Sibyl it was a source of new pleasure to look at their presents, plentifully seasoned as they were with sugar-plums, and talk over the wonderful occurrences of the past evening; for Philip and Fred Dr. Waldemar found plenty of amusement and occupation; while Mrs. Waldemar and her mother and Margaret took Helen under their own especial care, and gave her, what was better than all their other gifts, the sympathy and interest of cultivated minds, and noble, disciplined hearts.

It was arranged that they should dine late in the day; Mr. Humphrey was to join them then, and when he left his children were to go home with him.

"I think Helen is the loveliest girl to entertain I ever knew," Margaret said to her brother, as she met him alone in the Hall at lunch time: she forgets herself so entirely, and is so ready to be amused, so full of interest in all you show or tell her. If I had spent this morning with some girls, I should be tired enough now to go to sleep; for my brain would feel racked with my efforts to find amusement for them; but instead, with Helen, I feel as if I had been having a good play."

"You do?" Dr. Waldemar answered, lightly. "Well, you must not quarrel with me if I interfere with your play this afternoon. Miss Helen has an engagement with me I want her to fulfil."

"With you! Why, Guy, what are you going to do?" "Nothing very terrible," Dr. Waldemar said with a laugh, as he followed Margaret into the lunch-room.

He made no further allusion to the matter then, and during the lunch his attention was chiefly occupied with the boys and Sibyl; but as they left the table, he turned to Helen.

"Miss Helen, He asked, do you remember our talk in the kitchen last evening?"

Her bright face answered him more enthusiastically than her lips, for they only said, very demurely, "Yes, sir."

"Then do you think this would be a pleasant time for what you said would be the pleasantest work of the day? My mother and grandmother always rest for a while after lunch; the boys are going to try their new skates, and Margaret—with a laughing glance at his sister, who stood by Helen—"has a famous talent for story-telling, and would like nothing better than to take the little folks into some wonder-land of her own creation; and if you will come with me into the library, Miss Helen, I will try to fulfil the promise I made last night."