## A CHRISTMAS STORY.

(From the Lamp.)

I talked as he told me, and some fine nonsense I must have uttered, for Guy looked unutterable things at my incoherent replies; but my thoughts were with my brother. He joined us soon; his voice was calm, and his face had recovered its colour, but he still looked as though he had received a sudden and heavy blow. Shortly after May entered, and she too looked changed; but I could not quite fathom the expression of her face. There was some sadness and some fear, but there was even a softer light in her bright eyes, and something that told of hope and love.

I looked at Lionel as she entered. He winced for a moment, and his lip slightly quivered .-Music and light grew brighter as the evening wore away, but Lionel sought May's side no more. Ah! and I saw something else that made my heart ache too. I knew he had followed her partly to present her with a Christmas gift he had bought-a bracelet of gold, most beautifully wrought. I had seen it lying on his table a week before; and that night be gave it to me, and said, ' Kate, here, wear this thing if you like it.' But I knew better. I locked it away, and he never saw it for many years again.

No, he did not seek her again. She looked at him, her beautiful eyes full of wonder, then of sadness. For some time I believe she thought him merely jesting; then when she saw the coldness and avoidance was real, her colour faded, her merry voice was hushed, her ringing laugh

Katie, have I offended Lionel? He looks so strangely at me.'

Her lip quivered, and her sweet eyes filled with tears. Offended him! No, darling; but he is ra-

ther rexed. He finds he is obliged to leave Ferndale to-morrow.' Leave Ferndale? Did he know that when

he came ?. 'If he did, he never mentioned it. You know Lionel detests a fuss. He will tell your papa

to-morrow, most probably." 'Yes,' she replied mechanically, and said no more; but the colour never came back to her

face, or the light to her eyes again. Then out rang the chimes for the midnight

mass, and we agreed to walk to church. · I heard Guy calling for me in the hall,-

Miss Eyrle, may I take care of you, that no

Christman spirits run away with you?' I saw my brother with Lady Ducie as we passed by, and May with Mr. Leigh.

The little church spire soon appeared above the trees: the snow lay white upon it, and the moonbeams silvered it with loving care, as years ago they had done that lonely stable where lay tie Holy Child. The little porch was full of people, some exchanging Christmas greetings, some shaking away the snow that had fallen from the trees on their heavy cloaks. In another minute we were in the church, and lost in admiration and love. It was so beautiful; the pillars were wreathed with laurel, and masses of berried bolly crowned each picture. The altar was one mass of green; the wax tapers glimmered like stars amongst it. A little crib was on the right side of the church, and there, without book or word, one read the story of Christmas. There was the chilly winter landscape. the little snow-covered stable, where the ox and the ass had tound shelter; there was the manger, and there-oh, miracle of love-lay the Holy Child, His fair heavenly face turned towards us, of look and manner, but I have not the honor to His sweet eyes full of love and tenderness, His little arms outstretched, as though inviling us to bim, the little lips just parted with a smile; and yet something mysterious and sad was in the smile, as though he knew already how many hearts would be hard and cold to Him,-as though even in the crib the shadow of the cross was over him. Who could resist Him? Who could turn from that pleading smile and those outstretched hands? Near Him was His fair and spotless Mother, and His boly loster father, St. Joseph. . Soon the deep pealing tones of the organ

broke the silence that reigned in the church.-First came the white-round acolytes, with their lighted tapers and fuming incense; then the priest, in his costly vestments; and the Holy Kyrre crying for that mercy which is never refused; loud and triumphant rang out the Gloria, with its good tidings of great joy. Then like the distant echo of angels, came the Adeste, never to be heard without tears, so powerfully it speaks to the heart, and surs it to its inmost speaking as no other melody does of the loved grow holy as its notes were heard, Ah! let us hands were joined in his; her beautiful face, leave you, but Lionel is going abroad, and wishes six months. He presented himself one evening wild longing to look once more upon his home.

Pray that some face is shining among the angels bathed in tears, was bent eagerly forward; her me to go with him.' She rose, her lips parted, at Ferndale with the information that he found. He had failed, for as yet he had made neither.

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ever round the throne of Gud the Sanctus prepared us for the mystery soon to be accomplished. A deep awe and silence fell on the church; the out seeing you, -without one word of hope and angels lay prostrate, and men's hearts were encouragement from you. bowed, as the Bube of Bethlehem again descended from the bright heavens to be with sinnotes, brought us nearer to Him, and then the glorious midnight mass was ended.

As we rose to leave the church, I saw my was a death-blow to him. brother's face wet with tears : and as we passed

## CHAPTER II.

Christmas morning dawned bright and beautiful, and after early mass we all assembled in the comfortable, warm breakfast-room, where all the Christmas greetings that had not been finished the night before were now ended. Lionel had recovered his usual half-nonchalant look, but poor May was but a shadow, compared to her brilliant self the night before. Lady Howard fancied it was the late hours. Lionel alone, to my astonishment, but looked as though he knew more about it. I caught once an expression of pity on his face, as he looked at her, but it was soon succeeded by one of pain.

Such a clamour was raised, when Lionel declared his intention of leaving that day, that notwithstanding his intense desire to be away, be was obliged to remain. Only May sat still and silent while the rest gathered round him; it is was heard no more. Once she came to me, and true her lips quivered and her hands trembled. as they played nervously with the chain she had drawn from the Christmas tree, but she gave no sign of aterest in what was going on. Only I, who knew and loved her as no other did, knew what was passing in her heart. I read the story written in the pale face and compressed lips; I knew that, do as she would May Howard loved my brother. I wondered only what had hap-pened. During the course of that, to me, long

and dreary day, I drew Luonel aside.

'Dear brother,' I said, 'I do not ask your secret; let me only speak to you of what I have long known, your great love for May Howard.

'Go on, Katie; what have you to say?' 'I do not wish to ask for your confidence, brother, but do you not see that May loves

'I do not, indeed,' he answered with a bitter

'Then you must be blind, and most obtuse.'

Why, most logical lady?

Because it is so easy to be seen. She has known you for years, and always cared more for you than any one else. I know it from a thousand things she has unconsciously done and said. See, last evening, when you came back so cool and strange, how unhappy she became; look, today, how pale and unlike herself she looks.?

'Not for my sake, Katie-nay, believe me, not for me. I loved her; I never sold her so, but I loved her years ago, and waited until now to ask for her. I came to Ferndale last evening, Kate, with that one object, and I leave it with the bitter conviction that she has never cared for me, but has encouraged me to bide-I will whom she could not even present in her father's not say what.

' No, do not. What, you, Lionel, accuse my pure sweet May of being insincere - she, who is truth itself?

' She is, and has been, though perhaps unconsciously; and now, Katie, do me the favor to mention the subject no more. I tell you, I know the story that occasions Miss Howard's change

play any part in it.' The next day be went, and I was left with May. It was strange that Sir John and Lady Howard never suspected the cause of his leav ing, or his attachment to Mar; but Lionel was not a demonstrative man, and he had never mentioned one word of his love even to its object .-But I must tell you now, dear reader, what was the shadow that had fallen on May, and obscured for a time her brightness and beauty. never knew it until years after, when an accident revealed it; then I discovered the cause of my brother's sorrow, and his abrupt departure from

Ferndale. When May went out of the drawing-room, he, as you know, at my suggestion, followed her, hoping to overtake her in the corridor; but, to Sacrifice began. Soitly and sweetly rose the his surprise, instead of going into the servants' hall, she went into the entrance-ball, and took a large mantle that was hanging there, left by some of the visitors. She passed quickly through the dining-room, through a long suite of rooms that led into the conservatory. All were in darkness, but the bright moonbeams illuminated depths. Year after year we hear it, yet it is the conservatory; by their feeble light he saw ever new, bringing old memories before us, and her open the door that led into the garden .-Still wondering, and yet not liking to interrupt and lost. We hear again the voice that used to her, he turned to leave the place. When he sing it, and is now husbed for ever. We see as reached the door, he heard the sound of voices,

for it to-night.

May, I could not leave England again with-

Lionel would have gone, but all power had left him. He could neither move nor speak; he ful men. The Agnus Dez, with its pleading would have fiel, but could not; he would have spoker, but words were denied him, and against his will he stood and heard, though each word

May's clear voice continued, 'Do accede to the crib, he knelt for a few moments, and I my plan; come in with me now. I promise you prayed that the Holy Child might comfort him. all you can ask; they love me to well to refuse me anything."

'No, it is not here or thus that I shall enter Ferndale. I am far too proud; even Christmas, with its holy tenching, has not bumbled me, it has only softened my heart. Now I will away again, and when I enter these old halls it shall indeed be as an honored guest.

'But it is so far, and you will be so long ab-

'Time and distance are nothing to me, May, when I have an object to gain. Besides, I have something to encourage me now I have seen you; the memory of your sweet face, and the sound of your dear voice will never be absent from me. I shall think of this one half hour's happiness, and it will nerve me to do great things. I am thankful to God that I have seen you.'

'At least let me mention your visit or your

'No, neither now, dearest May. I must leave you. I cannot stay to hear the chimes of the Christmas bells; it would unnerve me.' Something else followed, in a lower voice, and then May drew torth her little purse. 'This is all 1 have at present, but take this, and this,' she added, taking from her arm the golden bracelet, and from ber fingers the costly rings.

'I will take it, May, darling, for some day I shall repay you with interest. Now good-bye, and hope and pray for me.

The stranger drew nearer, and Lionel saw him plainly. A tall, dark man, wrapped in a large cloak, he drew May to him, and it seemed as though they prayed together. May's whole was just touched by the silver light of the moon. which glittered too over May's dress, and the pearls twined in her dark hair, and the weeping girl kneeling on the ground. Then she rose and est the room. Her dress touched Lionel as he stood spell bound and motionless; she went quickly to her own room. Liouel remained some time, then by a great effort he summoned again the faculties that for some time had left him, and returned to the drawing room. Whether minutes or hours had passed in that interview he never knew. There were times when it seemed to him a delirium or a dream. May, whom he had so long loved, and who, if there be truth in look and deed, bad loved him, to love another,-one house, but met clandestinely. No, it was im possible; yet he had seen and heard it. If she, with her beautiful, noble face, and perfect character, was not true and candid, who was? If one so fair and so seeming good could have secrets from the kindest of parents, and the dearest of friends, who was candid and open? Poor Lionel, and yet he bore his disappointment well.

I remained alone with May. We had a merry Christmas; then one by one the Christmas guests left, until I alone remained. Then and then only I saw the full extent of the change that had fallen upon May. It was not only that the once rich color was gone, and the large dark eyes wore a sad and weary expression, but the vivacity, the wit, and guiety that had made her the charm and delight of the hame circle were gone too. She tried hard to keep up appearances; she gave way to no weakness. I never heard her complain or repme; in society, a rest less manner half hid the loss of her gay spirit; she forced herself to be what she once had been naturally. Alone the mask fell off, and I have seen her sit for hours with that weary look upon her face, that tells of the anxious, restless spirit within, never speaking or heeding what I said .-My brother's name was never mentioned between

us. I knew she loved him, and he had left her. I knew she was clinging to me as the one link between him and herself; once and once only I beard her speak of him, Lionel found it dreary made life sweet to him destroyed. He left the

in Heaven. Then the grand chant that floats words just reached him: 'I did not dare to hope as though to speak, but no words came. I went college rules insupportable. High words rose on, 'We may be absent some years, for he speaks of winters in Rome.'

She interrupted me then, Lionel going abroad? Why? 'I do not know; he is not very happy, I be-

lieve. Will he not come once to Ferndale before he goes?

No, not once, I am sure. Oh, May, what have you done to my brother ?'

'Ask, rather, Katie, what has he done to me? Why did he seek me? I never sought him; why did he try to make me love him, and then leave me without one word? But that is enough; I have done wrong to speak so; it would have been better for me had I never been born.

'Nay, not so, May. God sends trouble and trial for some wise purposes. There are some characters that never obtain their full perfection until they have drunk the butter but wholesome cup all must taste. Suffering teaches useful lessons, May; do not let it be in vair for you.

I left her; and though for some years I did not see her again, yet I know my few words bore fruit. She was less gay and happy than before; she lost the ringing laugh and witty flow of words, but she became more humble of heart, more thoughtful, more attentive to her religion, and, if possible, kinder to the poor. Suffering did her good; it toned down some qualities, rather too strongly marked in her character, and taught her some holy lessons, that during her future life she never lorgot.

## CHAPTER III.

And now, dear reader, will you go back with me for twenty years; that is, just one year after Sir John Howard has brought his lady home to Ferndale, when the bells are ringing in honor of the birth of their son and heir; when the beautiful babe lies in his cradle, and his fair young mother contemplates and dreams over him.

Oh, mothers, you have all dreamt over your children; you have seen the brightest visions; you have fancied your boy a saint or a hero, a great man and a good one; you have imagined the time when you should be old, and he in his frame shook with convulsive weeping; another turn protect you. You never, no, thank God! minute and he was gone. Thinking herself you never picture the fair sleeping child haughty alone. May knelt and went for some time without and ungrateful, or cruelly careless and unkind control. There was something weird like in the towards you. No; nor did this young mother, scene. The dark room, with its many plants, as she watched her babe. She saw he bad a face that would one day be noble and handsome she fancied him like the portrait of Sir Ralph Howard, that hung in the picture-gallery: he had been a Crusader and a knight without fear or reproach; she hoped for even better things for her boy. There were no bounds to her ambirion or her love. Poor mother! Poor child! Years after she wept in that same room the pitterest tears a mother can shed.

Phillip Howard grew up a beautiful but wayward boy. May was not born until he was five years old, and during that time he certainly was spoiled. He was idolised by both parents to an excess almost faulty. n after years they bit terly repented that in this his early infancy they had not controlled and brought under subjection his violent temper and great self-will. The boy could not bear control; he fought against it on every occasion. While still a child people laughed at him, and said. 'He has the spirit of a man already;' but then year after year passed, and things grew worse; then they did what ought to have been done years before, try to control him. He had some fine noble qualities, too; he was brave and daring, fearless of danger, generous and incapable of a meao or false action; a lie never stamed his lips, and he was passionately fond of his mother. She had more influence over him than any other. When May grew older he became londer of her than of any one, or anything else.

When the time came for Philip's education to commence, tutors were first tried at home. After changing masters about every three weeks for one year, Sir John abandoned that idea. No one could do anything with the boy; he would not obey, he would not learn; he would have his own way, and do just as he liked. They then sent him to a large public school for a short time. Things went on better; the novelty pleased bim; but he soon grew tired. That school was changed for another, from which Master Philip was sent as incorrigible. Then his parents became alarmed, and set to work in good earnest to try to control the boy. It was too late. For the first time the mother's face wore a pained and anxious look, and a share of care settled work enough living with all the hope that once upon the good squire, that after years only deepened. It would be long to trace Phillip's child army, sent Aunt Alice to Ferndale, and asked hood. At the age of seventeen a handsomer, me to go abroad with him. I consented, as I finer spirited, or braver youth was never seen; would have done to any other plan which could or a more uncontrollable one. In vain did the make him happier. Of course I told May. I mother plead, the father threaten, or the masters remember so well going to her, with the letter in advise; he brooked none of it. As a last rein a dream that face that used to brighten and and saw that a stranger had joined May; her my hand and saying, May, I am grieved to source he was sent to college, where he stayed at Periodie with the information that the Mount

then between the proud boy and his kind father. The mother wept and prayed; only God knew what she suffered.

'A bad son, sir,' said Sir John, 'makes a bad man; he who cannot control himself will never command others. You will never be fit to succeed me at Ferndale. Had you been the son of a poor man, you must have learned to study or to work; it is presuming on that which I must leave you that makes you idle and uncontrollable.3

The boy's face darkened; his eyes flashed with a light that frightened his gentle mother.-She caught his arm. 'Philip,' she cried, 'do nothing rash; nothing that you will repent hereafter.' She read a resolution in his face that would never break or bend.

'Never fear for me, mother: I will only show you that I could have made for myself a name and a home even had my father not been able to give me one.' She little guessed the meaning of his words. She only knew that that evening he embraced her more tenderly than he had done for some time before. She even fancied the tears were in his eyes as she kissed and blessed him. She heard him go to little May, and then, as though still anxious to be with her, he returned and said: Bless me again, mother; you do love me, do you not, in spite of all my faults?

Poor mother; it was well she looked so fondly and lingeringly on him that night, for she never saw her child as a boy again. The next morning a cry of sorrow was heard in the old manor house, for its heir was gone, and there, on the table of his little room lay a letter directed to his mother; ill written, badly spelt, and blotted with tears. It only said that his father had taunted him with want of spirit- in not caring to learn or to obey; because of which he should leave him; and that now he would never, no never, touch his father's money, nor owe anything to him; he would show his father that he could make a name for himself independently of all aw. Poor foolish boy. There were some redeeming words of strong affection for his mother; and many fervent promises that when he should be such and great he would come and make her happy. Ah! well; he was proud, stubborn, and toolish; but the boy's heart was not all bad. There was nothing more; no clue to his whereahouts; only on turning the other other page, they found, more wretchedly written than ever, and almost allegable through the tears that had fallen upon them, these few words :-Give my kindest love to little May, and never tell her I was not good.' The poor mother wore that letter next to her heart until it was faded and illegible; it was all that was left to her of the beautiful babe she had dreamed over. Few people ever knew the truth. The butler, who had grown grey in the service of their family, and May's nurse, were the only persons besides his parents who knew that the heir of Ferndale was wandering through the wide world. To others it was stated that he was abroad studying; as indeed he was, some hard but not unprofitable lessons; learning to find his level, to know himself as he was and as others estimated bim. May knew no more than this.

A deep cloud fell then over Ferndale. True, the boy had been haughty and imperious, but still kind and generous. The servants, while they spoke gravely of his faults, idolised him.-He seemed to fill the house with sunshine. Now it was all gode. Lady Howard drooped from that hour, and the good squire pined after his wayward son. Nothing could restore the poor mother to happiness; her heart cried might and day for her darling child. Her face lost its color, her step its lightness, and she became a feeble, delicate invalid.

When May grew older she perceived something was wrong. Her papa took her in his arms one day, and told her never to mention her poor brother's name to mamma again. She knew the truth at last-her old nurse told her : but I must not anticipate.

Phillip had found liberty at last. He went to Liverpool, and worked his passage over to America, and there joined a party of backwoodsmen, to whom on account of his strength and bravery, he was a valuable acquisition. He wrote home once or twice to say that he was well and happy. So some years passed, and Phillip enjoyed liberty in its perfection: so engrossed was he with the novelty of his life, that he had scarcely one thought for home. It is true sometimes when sleeping out in those dark forests, he would lie for some hours gazing on ... the midnight skies, perhaps, among the stars that ... glimmered on him he samebis mother's sweet face; it may be that in the wind's whisper he heard her voice. Those who were near him heard him sometimes sob out her name in his ... sleep. The mother's prayers were heard; here

wild wayward boy never forgot ber. So be lived for some years, and then came a