

## The Inglenook.

### "Auntie" Dill's Surprise Party.

BY HOPE ALTON.

Ten bright faces and as many pairs of busy hands were gathered in Rachel Lister's dainty room, one day, just after the holidays. The "Do Something Circle" they called themselves, and had taken for their motto: "Do something for some one, each day." Some days it was just home work, the lifting of a burden for one of the dear ones there. Sometimes a helpful story or cheery poem read to a lonely "shut in," or a bunch of flowers laid on a sick one's bed. They held their meetings once a week, gathering at the home of each member, in turns. All through the holiday season they had worked busily, but now their hurry was over and they felt as though they had earned a little rest. So that day found them at the old parsonage, the guests of Rachel, the minister's daughter.

"Just bring your lightest work, girls," Rachel had said, so while nimble fingers plied crochet hooks and knitting needles, equally nimble tongues talked over what they should do next.

"Now that we have given the Primary Class their Christmas tree, the old women at the poor house their New Year's dinner, and finished up the box for the 'Home,' I don't know what we shall do next," said Laura Marshall.

"Not I," echoed Marie Jackson, "for I haven't the ghost of an idea. A penny for your thoughts, Celia," she continued. "You look as if you might have some plan in that curly brown head of yours."

"Well," answered Celia Brown, running her fingers through her short brown curls till the girls told her she looked like Paderewski; "I'll tell you what I have been thinking. Let's give 'Auntie' Dill a birthday party."

Nine pieces of work were dropped in as many laps, while a chorus of "Oh! How delightful! How did you think of it?" arose from the circle of girls.

"It was this way," answered Celia. "We have done so much strictly charitable work the past two or three months, that I thought a change would do us all good. Our work has been from pity, and I trust, too, from love to our Saviour. But it seemed to me as it would be pleasant to put personal love in the place of pity, and as I knew we all loved 'Auntie' Dill, of course, I thought of her at once."

"But what about her birthday, and how did you know of it?" asked Jennie Adams.

"It is two weeks from to-day," replied Celia, "and I found it out by accident. Sister Lottie's birthday was last week, and she had a little party. 'Auntie' happened in while the children were at tea, and nothing would do but that 'Auntie' Dill must sit up to the table and have a piece of the 'bird-day cake' too. And little Roy Western who sat next to her, looked up and said, 'Does you has bird-day cakes and parties too, Auntie?' And I fancied I saw a tear shine in the kind old eyes as she answered him. 'No, dearie, Auntie Dill is all alone and won't have to bake her own cake and eat it, too.' 'And when is your birthday?' went on Roy. 'I wants to know, so I kin bring some sugar hearts and help you keep it.'

'Bless your dear heart,' said 'Auntie.' 'My birthday is in February, the fourth day, and when Sister Jane was home, we always kept it together, for she and me are twins.'

"So then," went on Celia after stopping to catch her breath. "I made up my mind, that if you were willing we would give the dear old soul the happiest birthday she had known since 'Sister Jane' went West."

You may be sure the rest of the girls were more than willing, and spent the remainder of the afternoon in planning.

"We mustn't give anything that even looks like charity, you know," said Celia, "for, in the first place, she doesn't need it, and in the second, we want her to know that it is done because we love her."

And now a word as to who "Auntie" Dill is. On the edge of Brookton stands an old brown house, with a noisy, clattering brook, from which the town takes its name, running just at its side. It is the old Dill Homestead where the dear old lady, is known throughout the country, far and near, as "Auntie" has lived all her life of over sixty years. She loves every stick in the old house, while every foot of ground in the little farm is dear to her. She often sits alone by her fire in the winter evenings and thinks of the old father and mother and her twin sister Jane, who once made up the family circle. But the father and mother have slept many years in the old churchyard close by and the big West has swallowed up Jane and her husband, not ten twenty years before. People often wondered that she should live there all alone, but she said she was happier so. She could not bear to see strangers about the old place, and nothing would harm her in quiet Brookton. And so the days sped on until the eventful 4th of February rolled round.

Everything seemed to work just right for our happy circle. A genuine snow storm had come, leaving splendid sleighing in its wake. So when the morning dawned bright and clear, with a suspicion of spring in its sunshine, Domine Lister sent Rachel up to the old house to see if "Auntie" would take a sleigh ride with him and Mrs. Lister that afternoon, and the unsuspecting old lady gladly consented. The girls waited until the sleigh went out of sight and then began to gather at the old brown house. There was no trouble in entering, for if anyone wanted to leave their house alone, they turned the key and then left it hanging on a nail beside the door. "Auntie's" cozy sitting room was soon filled with the merry crowd, and such a chattering of tongues and rippling of laughter ensued that the staid old cat sat up in the arm chair, lazily winking and blinking, wondering what it could all be about.

But there was no time to spare. Packages were quickly undone, and various dainty articles arranged upon the sitting room table. There was a delicate cup and saucer, two fine engravings daintily framed, a copy of a rare devotional book, another of "Snow Bound," a soft bright tinted shoulder cape, a head rest for the old easy chair, a lovely calendar with Bible text for each day, and a tiny tea pot, just big enough for one. And Vera Dorne had brought a large bottle of violet perfume, because she had heard "Auntie" Dill say once that was her favorite

scent. Then in the center they placed a photo of the D. S. C. prettily framed in birch bark by the dextrous fingers of Mae Bloom. When all was settled to their liking they went into the kitchen to spread the table for tea. Not the tiny table on which "Auntie" took her lonely meals, oh no!—that was far too small. But Rob and Harry Verdain soon brought over their extension table to make room enough for the tea party. Table cloths and napkins were brought out and "Auntie's" fine old china was set out.

"If the dear old lady was the least bit 'cranky'" quoth Celia, "we would not dare to take such liberty, but she won't care."

"Just think of giving Miss Letitia Green a birthday surprise," laughed Laura Marshall; "I am afraid we would be more surprised than she would."

"Hush, girls," said Rachel, "remember we never backbite. But hurry, Papa said he would be back at half-past three, and it is after three now."

But before the sleigh bells jingled at the gate, the table was spread, the fires snapped and crackled, and everything was ready.

"Auntie" Dill came slowly up the walk, a happy smile on the placid face. And a thought like this was running through her mind: "It was so good of the Domine and his wife to remember me. I don't know when I have enjoyed a ride so much. And to think, it's my birthday too. It's just like the dear Lord to send me such a treat." She looked for the key to open the door, but just then it flew open and a chorus of fresh young voices cried out: "Many happy returns of your birthday, 'Auntie'!" She looked so bewildered that they drew her inside, with laughing looks and merry chatter. But when she got in the sitting room and saw the table spread with gifts, then she understood.

"Oh you dear, dear girls," she cried, "to think of a lonely old woman like me. And this morning when I got up, I sighed and almost cried because it was my birthday and I had no one to help me keep it." She laid aside her wraps and went to the table exclaiming over each article with the joy of a little child. But I really think the picture pleased her the most of all. The girls hung it where she could see it as she sat in her favorite chair. "It will keep me from getting 'the blues,' girls, when I sit here alone," she said.

The afternoon soon wore away. The girls would not let her go in the kitchen when she wanted "to see about the tea," protesting that she was their guest for the day.

"Don't worry about the tea, 'Auntie,'" said Celia, "the fairies will look after that." But two of the girls stole silently out, and when the short winter's day turned gray and the lamps were lighted, "Auntie" Dill was escorted out to tea.

Very lovely the table looked. In the centre stood a large lamp, sent over by Mr. Ludlam, the merchant at Woodville, who had lived one year in the Dill Homestead and carried away many sweet memories of the old place. He had heard of the birthday party through his niece, Jennie Adams, and had begged permission to send a remembrance also. No need to tell of the dainty things which graced the table, but one thing was missing. There was no big, uncut birthday cake. But just as they were sitting down, the door opened and in came a bevy of little ones, Roy Western at their head, carefully bearing a large cake which the girls hastened to relieve them of and to place upon the table. And when "Auntie"