

## Returning the Presents.

Written by Arnold Golsworthy.

SOPHIE MEADOWS sat in the little parlour at the back of her mother's shop and gazed dismally out into the garden where the last brown leaves were falling from the lines on the soggy footpath below. The scene was not altogether an unsympathetic one for Sophie, since she was sad at heart that dull, misty afternoon. Indeed, there were signs that she had been crying: and when Sophie cried her nose grew very red indeed, and a woman will not incur a risk of that sort without the most acute provocation. In the spring it had all been so different. David Trotter, who managed the village flour mill for his father, and who was besides a most eligible young man in every way, had asked Sophie to be his wife, and the earth had seemed so fair to her then. The song of the skylark had a new meaning for her at that time, and the swallow's nest that was building in the eaves over her window developed, from a great nuisance, into a pleasing and blessed allegory. Summer had been spring intensified; and the brightness of life had seemed quite dazzling; but now everything was cheerless and damp, the sun was cold, and the fire of true and only love had spluttered out and left Sophie with a bruised heart and red nose.

Everybody knew it was David's—that is Mr. Trotter's—fault; or, at least, everybody to whom Sophie had mentioned the matter. Sophie's mother had perhaps not quite grasped the full meaning of the awful crisis in her daughter's bright young life. The good soul had even spoken lightly of it, affecting to treat it as a mere lov-

er's quarrel, and that at a time when Sophie had been seriously considering whether she ought to go into a nunnery or just pine away and die in the back parlour at home. Sophie knew for a fact that David—or, rather, Mr. Trotter—had been seen flirting with Faith Duker, the creature who set her cap at everybody. The thing had been seen in the village; and after a likely bit of scandal had gone the round of a village like Dunstead, its own mother would not have recognized it at the finish. David had gone so far as to meet the creature a second time by appointment, and that, of course, capped his iniquity. Everybody knows that no self-respecting girl can put up with goings-on like that. It would not have mattered so much if he had admitted his error, and had endeavored to earn his forgiveness by a fitting display of contrition. But David had had the effrontery to deny the charge, and had actually punched young Harper about dreadfully for just casually mentioning the matter to a circle of friends at the Blue Anchor. Which just show you the true character of people like David—I should say Mr. Trotter. And yesterday Sophie had taken her pen in hand and after laboriously studying the dictionary so as to be sure that she had got the long words right, had intimated to Mr. Trotter in cold and dignified terms that all was now over between them, and he would receive, per bearer, the presents he had made her, and henceforth they were strangers for evermore. Amen.

On other days Sophie would have been helping her mother in the shop; but to-