

old North, a young mechanic, asked her hand in marriage. The Sinclairs refused his suit because he was poor. However the young girl loved Harold, and finally married him. From that time the door of her sister's home had been closed against her.

The Norths had removed to a distant city, and Bertha had written several times, but Mrs. Sinclair always returned the letters unopened. No news of them had reached her for a long time. Mr. Sinclair had died five years before, and Mrs. Sinclair was alone with her two daughters. In the early autumn, she had learned by a newspaper paragraph, that the Norths had returned to the city where she was living. The paper stated that Harold had been seriously injured by falling from a building upon which he was at work.

Here Mrs. Sinclair's reverie was interrupted by the entrance of Mae, her youngest daughter.

'Oh, mamma,' the girl cried, her pretty blonde face aglow with earnestness, 'will you not buy a basket of flowers for the Children's Hospital, for Christmas? I told the matron I knew you would.'

Mrs. Sinclair promised willingly. It might ease the pain at her heart to give. She sighed as she noticed Mae's strong resemblance to Bertha. How had the latter stood ten years of poverty and toil? Ah, was there any such thing as peace?

As the week before Christmas slipped by, Mrs. Sinclair bestowed gifts with even more than her usual liberality. But the shadow was not lifted from her brow. 'On earth, peace'—those words were always ringing in her ears.

On Christmas Eve Nora found her mother sitting alone before the library fire, her hands clasped listlessly in her lap.

'Come with us to the church, mamma,' she coaxed. 'It is the festival for the mission Sabbath-school, and you will enjoy the music and the happy faces of the children.'

Mrs. Sinclair consented wearily. The walk through the thronged streets recalled memories of other days. Were there little ones in Bertha's home for whom she was to-night shopping? Or did poverty debar the mother from that joy?

They soon arrived at the church, and Mrs. Sinclair took her place in the family pew. When the curtain rose before the tree, Mrs. Sinclair almost forgot her vexation in the delight of the children, but in a few moments it was recalled to her mind as Nora stepped forward, and sang in her sweet, well-trained voice the quaint old carol, 'On earth, peace!' Margaret Sinclair closed her lips firmly and said to herself, 'I will forget.'

It is not always in our power to forget. Sometimes it is the voice of God which bids memory come to us, and, although we may refuse to heed the lesson it would fain teach, we cannot bar out the guest.

'Did you enjoy it, mamma?' Nora asked wistfully as the girls joined their mother. 'You look tired. I wish I had ordered the carriage to come for us.'

'Yes, I enjoyed the children's happiness. The walk will do me good.'

Mae drew her mother's hand in her arm, and they went home. When they ascended the steps Nora said,

'Now, we are going to have our gifts and a cosy little lunch. This will be the only bit of Christmas we can have all to ourselves. To-morrow there's the dinner-party

to all the Sinclairs, so to-night we will be happy together.'

Mrs. Sinclair had selected a set of pearls for Nora, while the quaint silver toilet articles for Mae had been ordered from Paris. The girls' gifts to their mother were of their own handiwork; Nora's a violet-embroidered lunch-cloth, and Mae's a picture painted by herself. Mrs. Sinclair recognized the bend of the placid river and the group of long-limbed elms as forming part of her favorite view from the verandah of their summer home. She entered so fully into the pleasure of her children that her face resumed its usual placid look. They enjoyed the simple lunch, and as they lingered over the fragrant coffee and grapes Nora said suddenly,

'I've been thinking of Aunt Bertha to-day, mamma, I wish you would let me write to her.'

It was a daring speech for the name of the Norths was never mentioned. Mrs. Sinclair replied coldly,

'We will not discuss that matter.'

A few moments later they separated for the night. Nora whispered as she kissed her mother,

'Forgive me, mamma, if I hurt you. Christmas always makes me think of those I love, and since papa is gone we are few in number.'

Mrs. Sinclair held her daughter in a close embrace for a moment. When she spoke she said, 'Good-night, darling. God is good to give me such dear girls.'

Alone in her room, Mrs. Sinclair paced restlessly to and fro. Why did this matter, long ago settled, persistently haunt her?

After a little she retired; but only to lie for hours staring into the darkness. At last she fell into a restless sleep. She awoke just as the first faint light of morning crept in at the window.

The first thought that came to her was of the Christ who so loved sinful, erring humanity that he gave his life to redeem the world from sin. One of his gifts had been peace. Could she in any way truly observe the natal day, of the Divine Saviour of the world, while refusing to accept the heaven-proclaimed message that heralded his coming? Ah, there was the solution to the problem that had so vexed her—Christ, the very incarnation of love and peace.

Finally, Mrs. Sinclair rose, and began, with trembling fingers, to dress. She put on a plain street suit, and a long sealskin cape. Quitting her room, she reached the lower hall just as a servant was carrying fresh bouquets of roses and violets into the dining-room. He stared in surprise at seeing his mistress arrayed for the street.

'Tell the cook to prepare breakfast for several more than the family,' Mrs. Sinclair said quietly, 'We will have guests.'

She opened the massive hall door and descended the steps. The city was slowly waking to life. The sun was rising, and through the closely-set houses she caught a glimpse of the eastern sky aglow with radiance. The crisp air, the comparative quiet of the streets, and the chiming of the distant bells—all these gave an added impetus to her new-born resolve.

A half-hour after leaving her home she was climbing the stairs of a crowded tenement-house.

At the door of the room to which she had been directed she paused and rapped. No reply came. Margaret waited a moment,

then entered the room. It was apparently a sitting-room, and poorly furnished, although neat and clean. Two boys of five and seven were sitting on the floor, their heads bent over the contents of their stockings.

One glance showed Mrs. Sinclair the home-made toys, the picture-cards, and the tiny packages of candy. The next moment she was kneeling by the children.

'Where did you come from?' the eldest boy asked, a look of wonder in his blue eyes. 'You can't be Santa Claus, 'cause you are a lady.'

'No, I am your Aunt Margaret. I came to tell you that Santa Claus has many beautiful gifts for you at my home. Will you go with me?'

'Yes,' and he sprang up, clapping his hands gleefully. 'I know you. Mamma loves you and talks about you. She cries sometimes; but she cries lots since papa got hurt.'

Margaret drew both boys in her arms. 'Tell me your names,' she said.

'Why, don't you know? I'm Alfred, and little brother is Max.'

Alfred! That was her beloved husband's name.

A door opened. There was a startled cry. Mrs. Sinclair looked up to see her sister standing near. Bertha was worn and faded, and upon her shoulder rested one hand of her husband. Harold leaned upon a crutch with his other arm.

Mrs. Sinclair advanced hurriedly. 'Bertha, Harold, dear sister and brother, will you forgive me? I ask it in the name of Christ.'

When they became composed enough to listen to mutual explanations, Mrs. Sinclair learned that the long illness of her sister had kept the family in straitened circumstances, and that Harold's accident had threatened them with actual want. She learned, too, that poverty and trouble had not dimmed the love of husband and wife.

That evening they were all gathered in the library of the Sinclair home. Nora was sitting on the hearth-rug the children nestling close against her, while Alfred tried to tell which of the many gifts he had received was the best.

'I think my best Christmas present was my dear little cousins,' Nora cried gayly.

Her mother's eyes rested lovingly on the group before the fire. 'The best of all Christmas gifts is peace, my darlings,' she said, 'the peace that Christ is always ready to give.'

A Merry Christmas.

'A merrie Christmas' to you!

For we serve the Lord with mirth,
And we carol forth glad tidings

Of our holy Saviour's birth.
So we keep the olden greeting

With its meaning deep and true,
And wish 'a merrie Christmas'

And a happy New Year to you!

Oh, yes! 'a merrie Christmas'

With blithest song and smile,

Bright with the thought of Him who dwelt

On earth a little while,

That we might dwell for ever

Where never falls a tear:

So 'a merrie Christmas' to you,

And a happy, happy year!

—F. R. H.

We wish all our readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.