

A STORY FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

By Mrs. H. A. Hobart.

It was the week before Christmas, crisp and clear and bright; full of bustle and preparation for the coming festivities. The shop windows were gay with bright-coloured fabrics, marvellously beautiful toys, and tempting confectionery.

Christmas, with its gifts and pleasures, was the theme most eagerly discussed just then by the juveniles, meet them where you might. And as the boys came trooping out of school that Monday afternoon, and distributed themselves in groups of three or four on their way

homeward, it was the most natural thing in the world for Charlie Drew to tell his friend, Martin Ray, what a splendid time they were going to have at his house on Christmas!

Father had brought home the biggest turkey, and the dearest little pig. Mother had made the prettiest frosted cake. And such lots of nuts as were going to be cracked! And there was to be a Christmas tree loaded with presents for all the family. It was not very strange that Martin Ray should listen very attentively to all that Charlie said; nor that when he turned the corner towards his home and left the other boys, that he should walk very slowly and wish they could have a Christmas at his house. Poor Martin! he could remember his father, who was a soldier, and had died a good while ago, while fighting with the soldiers far away, when he was eight years old (and he was twelve now). He thought of him so strong and brave; and of his mother and her struggle during those years to keep her four children clothed and fed; and of her pale face as she sat day after day over her sewing. Then he became so engaged in his plans for the future that he forgot all about Christmas. First, he was going to study hard; then he would soon be able to go into a store and earn money enough to buy a sewing machine that would give his mother time to rest. He would soon be a man, and rich, and he would take care of her, and she should be dressed so handsomely, and have a nice house and carriage, and he was just arranging about how many horses he would keep as he entered his mother's room. His sister, Grace, was standing by her, and enquiring why they never had any nice things for Christmas like other children.

Martin saw the sad, weary look in his mother's eyes, as she said quietly: "Mother is thankful that she can buy you bread. God knows what is best for us." And

as Grace still looked dissatisfied, she continued: "I should like to get you a new pair of shoes, and Martin a pair of boots, and Walter a cap, and Susie a little cloak. But we must be patient and get them when we can." Martin felt a strange choking in his throat. He wanted to get away somewhere, and picking up his cap, he told his mother he was going to see if they needed any wood cut at Mr. Clarke's.

Mr. Clarke's was a large house, not very far off, and Martin soon reached it, and heard from the maid that there was work for him to do.

cake, and had almost extended his hand for it, when the sad, weary look in the eyes at home seemed to be before him, and he said:

"If you please, Miss Hattie, I would rather leave it on the plate until I have finished this wood; I want to take it home to mother."

"Just eat this yourself, Martin, and I will get you another piece to take home," said Hattie.

But no; Martin would not take it, and stroke after stroke of his axe applied so vigorously told that he meant what he said.

"How is your mother getting along this winter?" asked Hattie, wishing to induce the boy to talk to her about himself and his mother.

"Pretty well," said Martin, a little timidly, "only she is very white and thin—she sews so steadily and sits up so late at night."

"What are you going to have for Christmas?" continued Hattie, anxious to know more about him.

"Nothing, ma'am," he said quietly; "mother was saying to-day that we must be thankful for bread. She cannot afford to get us any nice things for Christmas. Though, she said, if she was able she would like to get Walter a cap, and little Susie a cloak, and shoes for Grace and me. But mother can't do all that, Miss Hattie," and the boy's eyes were full of tears.

Hattie's were in about the same condition, as, a few minutes afterwards, when seated on a foot-stool by her mother, she said:

"Mamma, let us give Martin and his mother a real merry Christmas."

"How? What do you mean?" enquired Mrs. Clarke.

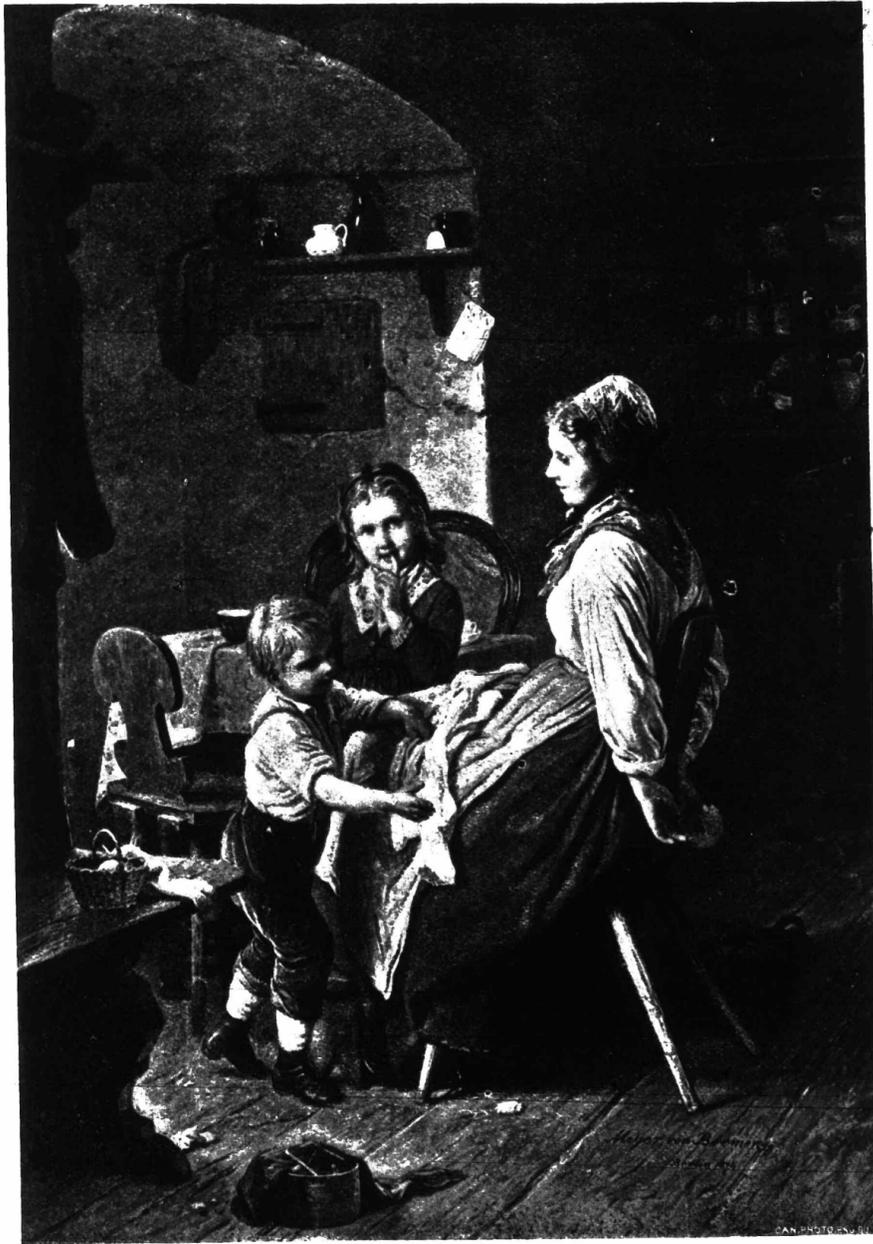
Hattie repeated what she had learned of Mrs. Ray's patient toiling and thankfulness, just for bread, and very soon gained her mother's sympathy.

"Let us set to work this very afternoon," said Hattie, eagerly, "for you know next Tuesday will be Christmas! We must ask all our friends to help."

That afternoon Hattie and her mother called on Mrs. Strong, a wealthy delicate lady, who could not exert herself sufficiently to do anything; but gave twenty-five shillings to be expended in purchasing whatever was needed.

Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Jones also entered with promptness into all the arrangements, so that by the close of the week everything was ready, and the preparations completed to Hattie's entire satisfaction.

Monday morning came again, and the widow rose early. And as she busied herself in preparing the frugal breakfast for her children, her heart was uplifted in devout thankfulness to Him who has promised to such as trust in Him, that "bread shall be



IN WHICH HAND IS THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT?

Mrs. Clarke came out and spoke very kindly to him, but seemed sad as she looked at him. Perhaps it was because he reminded her of a little boy who would have been about Martin's age and size, had he been alive. And it might have been for the sake of her own little Andrew, who was with the angels now, that later on she told the sweet-looking young lady who sat near her, to cut a large slice of cake and take it out to the little boy, who was busy at the wood-pile. Be that as it may, Hattie Clarke cut the cake and carried it out, and said to Martin in her own pleasant way:

"Rest a little while, Martin, and see how this cake tastes!"

Martin looked up, saw the nice, creamy