

## The Inglenook.

FOR DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

### A Christmas Story.

BY HELEN STIRLING.

**C**HRISTMAS DAY had come, and so had Santa Claus. For days Teddy had thought of it, and for nights he had dreamed of him. But thoughts and dreams had passed away, and the merry day had really come to stay for twelve long hours. In the stillness of the night Santa had crept softly through the house, leaving loving messages in every room. So many things he had left in Teddy's room, that Teddy knew not what to look at first, or which pleased him most. Games, books and toys lay all about, each with a word of love from some one.

Even a stocking, Papa's bicycle stocking which Teddy's mamma had hung on the door knob, was filled. Teddy had laughed as he and mamma had tied that stocking on the knob, and he had said, he scarcely expected Santa to fill it—why the toe of it almost touched the floor!

But Santa had filled it with good things. Oranges, nuts and raisins were hiding there. But one thing in that stocking surprised both Teddy and his mamma more than all else they found in it,—a hole, yes, right in the toe of that great stocking they found a hole. Mamma was quite certain it had not been there when she had hung it up. Teddy was certain he had not made it. How then came it there? It was quite a puzzler. But suddenly mamma clapped her hands and said, "I've guessed."

"Who, mamma!" cried Teddy, "What, who did it?"

"Can't you guess?" was the reply.

"No, no, mamma, I can't; please tell me your guess."

"Well, I guess, that that little mouse whom we hear sometimes scampering behind the walls, or nibbling with her little teeth, has been out looking for her Christmas treat, and has got it too, for see!" and she held up a nut candy from which all the nuts had been nibbled.

"And see!" said Teddy, "here are the marks of her little teeth," and he held up a chocolate candy, which had been nibbled.

"The bad thing," he said, "if I could only catch it."

"Oh, Tedd," said his mamma, "the poor little mouse wanted to have something for Christmas Eve too. She had no stocking to hang up, so she took some out of yours; but we will forgive her to-day won't we?"

Poor Mouse and her theft were soon forgotten in the merry hours that followed, and the dinner bell too soon called Teddy from his toys.

There was to be no turkey or plum-pudding at this time, for Grandmamma had asked them all to help her with her turkey and plum pudding at six o'clock that evening, and mamma having pity on little stomachs had prepared a simple but pretty luncheon.

But would you believe it, Teddy was cross? And Teddy grumbled; yes, Teddy who had wakened so early that morning to find so many beautiful things beside him all his own, was cross. And he said some very strange things—that it was no Christmas without plum-pudding, as though we were

made happy by eating; and that there was nothing to eat; as though plum-pudding was the only thing worth eating; and—but just as he was going to say another grumble, his mamma said, "Have I told you of the poor family of whom I have heard to-day. It is a very sad case. They are so poor that they have no house of their own. They have been for some time going about; staying in cellars or attics of empty houses, sometimes indeed I think, sleeping outside."

Last spring they found an empty house on one of the nice streets of this city. The family had moved to their country summer home, and this poor family did not think it would be wrong for them to slip in and use just one of the many empty rooms. They found a back entrance by which they could slip out and in unseen, and they chose a quiet corner in the attic. Having no furniture, it did not take them long to get settled. Their beds were on the floor on a bundle of such things as they could find.

For food they sought everywhere. The father went about picking up what he could, while the mother nursed the little ones. As they grew older she sometimes left them, and went in search of food also. But there was little to be found, they were very hungry; they at least went into the pantry and the cupboards of this house and helped themselves to what they could find there. This was of course very wrong, but they were very hungry, and it is hard to be honest and hungry.

So they passed the summer. But one day in the autumn, they heard a great noise, and peeping down from the attic they saw that the owners of the house had returned.

Such a noise and bustle there was. The little boy raced up and down the stair, and even up into the attic, but he was in such a hurry that he never noticed the little family in the corner.

Now the attic family found it very hard to get on. Many times when the little mother stole out to seek for food, she almost ran against the great big man, of whom she was most afraid. At such times she would whisk back to her corner in a great fright, and keep very still for a long time. Her only chance was after all had gone to bed, then she slipped noiselessly down stairs to seek for food. Sometimes she found some, often she did not, and they all had to go hungry.

So Christmas time came on. There was no money with which to buy even food, for the father of this family, sad to relate, had been taught only to steal, and thus only could he get food.

Christmas Eve had come, and still they had nothing, the father was so distressed about it that he was cross; but the mother had a brave little heart, and would not be discouraged. "Wait until they all go to bed and I will get something for you," said she. But she had longer to wait than she thought, for it seemed as if the good people of the house would not go to bed that night.

She stood for a long time at the door of their room peeping out with her two bright little eyes, and listening with her sharp little ears. Just as she was about to venture some one hurried by, and she had time only to dart back into the darkness.

At last all was still, and she softly ven-

tured out. No one was stirring she crept quietly down stairs, and was passing out through the little boy's room, when suddenly the great man whom she feared so much, entered the room bearing a candle.

How that little mother got into a corner behind a book case she never knew, but there she hid while the father and mother disposed of the parcels they were carrying and passed on to another room. She remained quite still, so thankful that she had not been discovered till all sound had ceased. Then she continued her journey down stairs but all in vain. Nothing was to be found. Slowly she came upstairs, swallowing her tears, as she had no handkerchief and feeling very sad. As she again passed through the little boy's room, she bumped against a great bag at the door. She ran past it, but came back in the hope that she might find in it something for her family, you see, she, too, had learned to steal. To her great joy she discovered by the scent that the bag contained many things which would delight her little ones. She tried to lift the bag, but could not move it. Nor could she open it. What was she to do? Suddenly a bright thought came to her, and standing on her toes, she opened a set of the cutest little knives, which she always carried with her, and cut a hole, just in the corner of the bag. What a treasure she found! Here was a rare treat for her little ones! away she scampered with one load to her little corner, down for another and back with it. No doubt she would have almost emptied the bag, but all too soon for her, the little boy wakened and jumped out of bed. How she scudded off to her room again; But she listened and watched, fearing that if the good people discovered the hole and that some of their goods were stolen, they might also discover them and their hiding-place.

Peeping down she saw the little boy seize the bag, and carry it over to his mother. Together they began to empty it, so happily. Suddenly the little boy cried out, and "oh! Mamma here's a hole!" This frightened the poor little mother so that she almost fell into a faint, and for a time she heard no more. What she heard next but added to her fright, for the little boy said, "If I find her I'll"—but his mother's gentle voice interrupted saying.

"Oh Teddy, the poor little mouse wanted her Christmas treat, too. She had no stocking to hang up, so she took some out of yours. It was not right for her to steal, but we will forgive her to-day—Christmas day! and the poor wee mother mouse went back to her nest of mice, and if ever a mouse was sorry she had stolen that mouse was."

By the time Teddy's mamma had finished her story, Teddy had finished his luncheon, and when he remembered that in our great cities there are many little boys and girls poorer than his attic mouse, he forgot to grumble, and folding his little hands, joined with the others with his heart as well as his lips, saying:

"God is great, God is good,  
And we thank Him for this food;  
By thy Hand must all be fed  
Give us then, our daily bread."

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