

and moreover you yourself will accompany and remain among your guests, at least for a little while. I know I am making a bold request in asking this, but I am sure you will not refuse it, and I promise you will not repent it."

The baron acceded to the request. Had he been asked to entertain grand company at his castle, in his present mood he would have refused at once and haughtily; but he was too generous to refuse anything asked in the name of the poor; besides he felt in his heart the truth of what the young priest had said to him; "There is no solace for grief like that of solacing the sorrows of others; and no happiness like that of adding to their happiness."

III.

CHRISTMAS Day came; and after the Grand Mass was over, the great hall of the chateau was opened, and tables were spread with abundance of good cheer; there were presents for the little children, too; and there were jongleurs who, instead of the customary love ditties, sang old Christmas carols in the soft Provincial dialect. Amidst the hilarity there was, what by no means was common in those days, order and decorum. This was due in part to the restraint and awe inspired by the chateau—opened for the first time in so many years; but more to the presence in their midst of the baron and the priest, who passed from one group to another with a kind word to each.

After a while the priest laid his hand on the baron's arm:

"Let us retire to yonder oriel window—there we may sit in quiet and contemplate the merry scene."

The baron gladly escaped from the crowd, but, as he seated himself, a sigh escaped him, and a cloud gathered on his brow.

"How happy you have made these good people," said the priest. "The merriment of the children has something contagious in it, has it not?"

"What have I to do with the merriment of other people's children—I, a poor childless old man?"

The baron spoke bitterly; for the first time in his life had he made an allusion to his griefs.

"But see these three pretty little

children coming towards us," the priest continued; "we did not see them as we passed through the hall." And he beckoned them nearer—a little girl about eight years old, a little boy some two or three years younger, and the smallest just able to walk; beautiful children they were, but dressed in the ordinary dress of peasant children.

"Do not refuse to kiss these pretty little ones for the Child who was born to-day," pleaded the priest, as he raised one on his knee. "Now, my lord, if it were the poorest vassal in your domains, would he not be a happy man whom these pretty ones would call grandpapa?"

The baron's face assumed a look of displeasure. "I want no more of this; entertain your guests as you please, but spare me my presence here any further. I am glad if I can do anything towards making others happy, but happiness for myself is gone in this world."

"My lord," said the Pere Rudal, "why is your happiness gone. When your daughter, your Clemence, threw herself and her little ones at your feet, and prayed you for the love of the little Child born in Bethlehem, to take her little ones to your heart, why did you coldly turn away and refuse her?"

The baron turned to him with unfeigned surprise. "What do you mean?" said he. "I have never seen her since and her children never."

"But you see them now."

"Oh father!" said a well known voice, and his own daughter Clemence was kneeling in the midst of her little ones at his feet.

The old man sank back in his seat—his daughter's arm was thrown around his neck—her head was resting on his heart—and after an instant's struggle between love, the divine instinct, and pride, the human fault, his arm was clasped closely about her. Pere Rudal lifted up the youngest child and placed it on the baron's knee, and then quietly stole away.

A merry place was the Chateau Regnier after that night; the rooms and halls were opened to the daylight;—there was romping and laughing of children from one end of it to the other. The Count de Regnault was sent for on