

with a sullen recognition of the rather strange fact, that he had never known a really merry Christmas in his life. As the ward of a gouty uncle, who could not endure noise or rich diet, he had not had a very fair chance to enjoy the festive anniversary as children are commonly expected to do. As a student in lodgings, he had made a few desperate grabs at its fleeting immunities from ordinary decorum, but the headaches and indemnifications of one sort or another that followed, took the gilt off the gingerbread. As an eligible barrister he had eaten prime Christmas turkeys bursting with a consciousness of truffles, and frolicked under mistletoe sprigs in a *moutons de panurge* fashion, because everybody else was doing it, but he could remember nothing distinctly merry or genuinely hilarious about that.

As a cynic, he had moped away two dreadful Christmases before his bachelor's hearth, and they were the worst of all! The loneliness of an unmated man, a cankering sorrow at all times, becomes in seasons of domestic jubilee a humiliation and a reproach. He had grown older in those two bitter years than he ought to have been at seventy! Laughing at love and marriage and the vaunted fruits of both, until the tears come into one's eyes, isn't the merriest device of all that the merry season sanctions. And now here was Christmas coming round again, and here was he posting back to his single-handed struggle with its heart-aches and temptations. He had thought it might be otherwise this year. He had drifted into politics, and the wholesome stimulus of the campaign had quickened his sluggish pulse, had made his blood flow free and warm again. His triumph at the polls had thawed out his frost-bound feelings, and made him a sensitive human being—almost a boy once more. And then his winter at the capital, so full of strange excitement; the fascination of the parliamentary pro-

gramme; the dignified disorderliness of the legislator's life, the late settings of the House, enlivened by the flash-lights of native oratory, and by the smiles and coquetries of native beauty storming the strongest fortresses from the galleries above ought to have bettered things for him. Of course to some extent they did. He was not a cynic now. He had seen fair women that had made him restless and thoughtful by turns. He had looked into calm grey eyes and felt the "Peace, Be Still" of their wise, wistful tenderness, quieting the troubled Rubicon of his mid-manhood; he had winced, too, under the less limpid glances of less scrutable but not less fascinating belles. He had all but touched the quick of life's sovereign mystery. He knew it by the sweet abstraction into which he lapsed so readily of late; by the sort of sonambulistic way in which he went through the common duties of the day, by the deep abiding consciousness with which he now awoke each morning and was soothed to rest each night, that where love was not, or had never been, the equilibrium of perfect manhood or of perfect womanhood was not conceivable; by strange intuitive understandings of the divine conclusion, that it was not good for man to be alone without some helpmate like unto himself, and yet not like! If he could but wake out of this dreamful mesmeric sleep and find his helpmate by his side! Someone to walk with him through the green glades of earthly paradise; someone to read his books; someone to share his hopes; someone to answer when he called in joy, in sorrow, in any human need; someone to take of his exuberant strength, to lean on his right arm, to wear the panoply of his protecting sympathy and sworn devotion; someone to watch with him in his hour of trial and temptation, with a cool hand for his hot brow and calm counsel for his troubled soul. Someone to fill heart, home and life with the joy that is man's birthright and the figure of his last inheritance!