

WHILST THE SNOWFLAKES FELL  
ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

## CHAPTER I.

The snowflakes came floating down softly—swiftly—silently, alike in origin, alike in nature, alike in form and hue, but, on reaching this planet earth, becoming wonderfully unlike in position. For some of the shining particles were arrested in their downward course by lofty mountain or towering steeple. Others descending lower, rested on snug manor-roof or farm-house, or still lower, whilst the greater number found their level on the wide-sweeping plain. Snow-flakes, however, being indifferent to position, it mattered little to them whether they fell high or low; and not a bit prouder, happier, or whiter looked such, for instance, as happened to light on the turret dome of Castle Dermott, than their millions of kindred that lay in fair pretty confusion on the terraced slopes below.

But even "pretty" things gain scanty admiration when they are as common as snowflakes on the 24th of December; indeed, "tiresome," "odious," "vexatious," were these special "snow-flakes" successively termed by Annette Dermott, who had intended spending the whole afternoon superintending the Christmas decorations in the church; but in consequence of the weather and a recent cold had been forbidden by mother to venture out of doors. "It is so disappointing!" she repeats for the fiftieth time, viewing despondingly the whitening world through the window-panes, which seem all tufted over with tiny feathers. "I had quite set my heart on having the church really prettily decorated this year, and now, I am sure the wreaths will be hung badly, and probably half the letters turned upside down! Is it not a very provoking storm, Ronald?" And Annette turns appealingly to her brother—a schoolboy of fourteen, who had just returned from gathering a bundle of holly, and was now enjoying a rest in the biggest easy-chair in the room.

"Yes, very. But any one can stick little bits of holly about," he answers.

"Stick little bits of holly about! How very stupid schoolboys are!" resents Annette. "I could have carried out my idea beautifully but for this horrid snow!"

"If it freeze to-night, how nice it will be walking to-morrow on the hard crisp ground!" ventured little Effie, the youngest sister, glancing up from the manufacture of a doll's bonnet, in which she had been absorbed for some time.

"Freeze!—and spoil the St. Stephen's hunt, the best fun in the whole vacation!" objected Ronald, now thoroughly in earnest.

"But a white Christmas would be so pretty—and I only remember black, wet ones," remonstrated Effie, quoting from her brief experience of nine years.

"Black Christmases! Did anybody ever hear such nonsense?" said Ronald. "I hope we may have a regular downpour of rain. Rain won't prevent Santa Claus coming, you know, Effie; and that's all you care about."

"I don't care much for anything Santa Claus can bring me this time, unless it be a doll with blue eyes to match exactly this bonnet." And Effie holds up her wee specimen of millinery. "Blue eyes, and real hair that I can curl myself every day, like what mother says her dolls used to have, all mine have only flax and I cannot fix it."

"That's because women get all the hair which was meant for dolls, to make up their own hideous frisettes and false 'ships' expounded Ronald, contemptuously. You'll be stealing your dolly's hair to do the same by-and-by, Effie."

Effie rather indignantly refuted this cruel prophecy as the sitting-room door was opened, and the servant addressed Miss Dermott,—

"The little boy, Martin Daly, ma'am, is returned from the church, and has brought up the 'greens' that were over, as you desired him."

"Returned is he? Then the church must be finished!" Annette half rises from her chair, but quickly reseats herself. "No; I shall not ask him how it looks as I know his answer would only vex me. Bid him leave those evergreens in the servants' hall and run home,—and here, give him this shilling, as it is Christmas time, and such a bad day. Christmas is really a most tiresome season—now isn't it, cousin Charlie?" she added, addressing the fourth and much senior occupant of the luxurions apartment, who, inviolated by an accident, reclined upon a sofa opposite the window, an open book in his hand. He did not immediately reply.

"Oh, don't expect an answer from cousin Charlie, he's dreaming as usual," laughed Ronald. "However, I'll settle the question by giving my own opinion thereupon, which is, that, except for vacation, Christmas is decidedly tiresome. I am sick of Christmas presents and Christmas trees; and as to Christmas cards——" Ronald paused, unable to call up a strong enough adjective.

atoms are!" he resumed presently. "Perfectly similar in every respect, yet what varied situations they happen to fall upon! Some, lighting on the high bank, will rest there undisturbed till gradually melted by the warm sun; others, descending but a couple of feet lower on the terraced walk, will be crushed into moisture by the heel of the first passer-by, or possibly Effie's own little feet to-morrow. Human beings are very much alike. It is only a mere matter of position or circumstances makes them apparently 'quite different.' High or low, rich or poor, they think and feel, suffer in pain, rejoice in happiness."

Annette glanced quickly at her cousin, then out at the snowflakes. "And so she, too, read the parable the unconscious particles, unfolded, a humbled, softened expression, replaced the dissatisfied, petulant look her face had worn all the morning. A great fault in her character was a proneness to treat, not unkindly, but proudly, unsympathizingly, people occupying an inferior

asked Annette, brightening up likewise—"We have only money. It is too late and snowy to send out to buy things this afternoon."

"Oh, I am sure mother would let us buy out of the store-room; only we must be sure to pay or else we would not be giving to Martin," decided Effie. "Do you think Martin would like things out of the store-room, cousin Charlie?"

"I am satisfied he will make no inquiries as to whether Santa Claus collected his offerings in a shop or mother's store-room," returned cousin Charlie.

(To be Continued.)

MAKE THE CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS  
HAPPY.

There's a time for work and a time for play. Much study is a weariness to the flesh, and rest, recreation, with fun and frolic, is the best medicine for a child who has been diligent in study for many weeks. Home

never is so sweet to the child as when he returns to it from school, where he has done well and won the approbation of his teachers. He feels that he deserves the praise he receives from his parents, and he enters with delight upon the pleasures and pastimes they have prepared for him. In after-life no recollections of youth are more lovingly cherished than the holidays, including Christmas and New Year's spent in a Christian home. They begin a little earlier now and last a while longer, so that the young folks manage to get two or three weeks' recess. But that is all well; they will study the harder and learn the more for the relaxation they have had. And if they are lazy and hate books, and will not learn, it is very little matter whether they go to school or not. At any rate, the holidays are the season for play, and they are wise who make the most of it. It is a sad mistake of some parents that all time is lost which is not spent in some positively useful work. Play is useful, but it is not work. Play is the efflorescence of young life, the blossom that precedes the fruit. It is quite as good in its season as the toll that comes by-and-by when the back aches with the burden of life. He is wise who finds innocent sport for his children, especially in the holiday season. This is the most difficult and delicate duty a parent is required to perform. The children get into the company of other children, and very soon insist on choosing their own amusements. These are often such as judicious and pious parents do not wish their children to participate in. What is to be done about it? To forbid is to grieve the children and cut them off from the company of others of whom they are fond. And yet there is only one side of the question for a sensible and conscientious parent to take. The health, morals, mind, and soul of the child may be at stake. To be firm in the right is the only kindred to a child who wishes to do wrong. And the child uniformly treated with indulgence in all things

innocent, will readily submit to parental counsel when tempted to go in the way of evil. I can set up no wall over which children may not jump. I cannot make out a list of amusements and say you may play this and must not play that. There are rural games, common fifty years ago and now, which would be shocking to the sensibilities of city people. There are amusements common in the city that would be justly regarded as evil in the country, but are actually no worse than many plays greatly enjoyed by the best of young people in the rural districts. There is not one standard of right and wrong for the city and another for the country. But things in themselves indifferent, or innocent, may be something else in other circumstances, associations and surroundings. It is therefore hard to draw the line. Let us be charitable in our judgment of others, and true to our own convictions.

Make the holidays happy days. Only the good are truly happy, and the only play,



MAKING FOR HOME.

"I wish we could invent a new way of spending Christmas," half sighed Effie. "Christmas without presents, trees, cards, or even holidays!" put in cousin Charlie, suddenly rousing himself. "Would that be the way, Effie?"

"Oh, no! for then it would be only like any other part of the year, and it ought to be quite unlike, you know. But if we could think of a new, pleasant, nice way!"

"I wonder how little Martin Daly spends Christmas," went on cousin Charlie; "or if he was ever tired of trees, or Santa Claus, or——"

"Martin Daly!" interrupted Annette, rather laughingly. "How could he? Of course he never even heard of Santa Claus; but then, he is quite different from us."

"Quite differently placed in the world, you mean." And cousin Charlie was silent again, whilst his eyes, this time raised from his book were fixed on the snowflakes, which still continued their swift, pretty descent.

"How similar to each other those white

social grade to her own; and now, all at once, this fault stood out in a strong repelling vividness before her; she became silent in her turn, feeling rebuked and repentant. Cousin Charlie was by no means an "over-lecturing" disposition; and he spoke after a pause in a lighter tone.

"Effie has been suggesting we should invent a new way of spending Christmas. The old 'tiresome' mode seems to have consisted exclusively in getting an overwhelming amount of presents and pleasure. What if we should try the variety of giving to somebody (who has had no former experience of them) a few of those good things whose reputation has made us feel sick! Suppose, for instance, we take poor Martin Daly, who has never even heard of Santa Claus, and surprise the little fellow with a basket of Christmas boxes?"

"A Christmas basket for Martin! What a grand idea!" cried Effie, clapping her hands.

"But how should we manage to fill it?"

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