

At the close of the year the merry bells rang out their glad peals through the keen frosty air, first to commemorate the birth of the Saviour of the world, and then to announce to the surrounding country that an heir was born to Courtney Hall. The Squire's cup of joy was full to overflowing, and a proud father was he as he stood in his magnificent library, surrounded by many of the neighbouring gentry, that had come to offer their congratulations, when the nurse entered with what appeared to be a bundle of shimmering lace, and begged leave to present to him the heir of Courtney.

The boy was baptized Francis, according to the family custom. The rejoicings were renewed at the Hall, and many humble homes were filled with good cheer by the Squire's bounty. Squire Courtney had now nothing left to wish for; he was as happy and satisfied as it was possible for a man to be whose affections are all centered in the present world, and cares nothing for the "Pearl of great price," without which the most wealthy are both poor and blind.

The young heir grew up strong and healthy, and became the idol of his fond parents, as well as of the servants of the Hall, who all vied with each other in showing him every attention; his childish fancies were all gratified and he knew no opposition. For six years he had no rival in the love of his parents or the homage paid him by all around. Petted and indulged, no wonder if at that early age he had begun to show