

Agnes lost her customary health,—her cheek grew pale,—and her movements were slow and languid. As even the bracing air of autumn seemed powerless to revive her, the Doctor recommended change of air, and insisted on her accepting Ellen's invitation to spend some months with her. Agnes most unwillingly consented to leave her mother, who refused to accompany her, much to the disappointment of Richard and Ellen, who wished Mrs. Leslie to dispose of her property and make her home with them.

But the old lady had always been accustomed to the freedom and charm of a country life, and her village had attractions for her which others might not see. There she was born ;—there was she married ;—all her memories, her joys and sorrows, clung around it, and it was the wish of her heart there to die. It was useless to attempt to overcome her objections ; but she urged the departure of Agnes, as she saw with anxiety her colourless cheek and wasting form.

Her neighbours promised she should never be left alone. She had sisters and nieces, with other friends, who would be glad to cheer the solitude of the lonely widow, and there was faithful Helen Murray, ever near with her counsel, her sympathy, and her aid.

Agnes consented to leave, and her kind brother and sister soon succeeded in restoring the bloom to her cheek ; and by cheerful conversation and companionship, to revive the spirits which such constant association with sorrow had impaired. They persuaded her to prolong her visit till after the Christmas season, fearing that a return to the scenes so fraught with painful remembrances at that time, might undo what the previous time had done.

And now the fourth Christmas eve in our simple story had come, with its preparations, its merriment and its memories.

Helen Murray, as of old, was with her friend Mrs. Leslie ; and as thought found utterance in words, they went back over the oft trodden paths of memory, and marking the mile stones one by one, rested at that centre of all their hopes and all their agony—poor Henry. Long did they sit together, till the afternoon wore into evening, and the moonbeams sparkled once more on the jewel-like icicles that hung pendent from the casement—still talking of the lost one, and trying yet again to fan the almost buried hope into life, that he still would return. But as they dwelt so fondly and yet so painfully on that absent one, memory and sorrow grew too strong, and Helen with her wonted unselfishness, forgetting her own grief, remembered his mother's, and rising, changed the subject.

As she stood by the window which the frost was painting with its silvery touches, the sharp ringing of bells fell upon her ear, and presently the stage sleigh with its bounding horses, was full in sight, well freighted with passengers, letters and news from the city.

'The Coach is late to-night,' said Helen ; 'while we were talking, we had forgotten about the letters from Ellen and Agnes, and our Christmas boxes,'