

## GRANDPA'S CHRISTMAS PARTNER-SHIP.

BY MARY D. BRINE IN HARPER'S.

They were counting their presents in Grandma's room.

While the dear old lady sat knitting away, Exchanging with Grandpa a nod and a smile Over the children at their play, Counting their gifts, till Arthur asked, As he climbed at last to his Grandpa's knee, "Say, Grandpa, say, when you were a boy Did you have a Santa Claus, same as we?"

"When I was a boy," said Grandpa then, "The jolliest Christmas that ever I knew Was the time when I went into partnership— I, and some of my comrades too— With kind old Santa, himself, and helped To make that Christmas a merry day For a lonely woman who, widowed and sad, Lived with her child not far away.

"A short half-mile from my own snug home Lived Widow Lane and her little Bess, And griefs and losses and sickness too, Had filled their hearts with a sore distress, Nobody knew them. Strangers they In a village. Nor sought they word or aid. But, boy-like (passing the house each day), We fell in love with the bonny maid,

"Whose hair was golden, whose eyes were blue, And who smiled at us as we loitered near, And whose home, we knew, could catch no gleam From the light of the Christmas-time so dear. So we made a plan with a boyish zeal That won from our elders a glad consent, And on Christmas-eve, when the stars were bright, We started out with a brave intent

"To act as Santa Claus' partners. So We carried her wood and piled it high, We filled a basket with goodies and toys, Then homeward stole 'neath the midnight sky, Leaving the tokens of 'peace, good-will,' To gladden the two, who would wake next day To a 'Merry Christmas' so unforeseen And a share in the season for us so gay."

"Oh, what became of the little girl?" The children cried, "and where is she now? And what did she do when she grew big?" "She wore white blossoms above her brow," Grandpa answered, "as pure as snow, And went into partnership with me For the sake of that Christmas long ago, And the best of partners she's proved to be."

"But what do you do together, say, And how are you partners, Grandpa dear?" Then Grandpa laughed and Grandmamma smiled, And drew the little questioners near. "What do we do together? Ah! well, We spoil you little folks every day, For grandmas and grandpas in partnership plan To spoil all children—so people say."

## AN ODD CHRISTMAS DINNER.

BY OLIVE THORNE MILLER.

Grace was happy that bright Christmas morning. Though her little sister was very ill, and they had no tree as usual, yet Santa Claus had slipped in quietly and brought her what she liked best of everything, three or four new books.

A long, delightful day she meant to have, curled up in a big blue chair in the library, reading. This pleasant picture Mamma spoiled, as Grace started off with her books after breakfast.

"My dear," she said, "I shall have to depend on you to keep the twins quiet to-day."

"Where's Mary?" said Grace, pausing with her hand on the door-knob, all the sunshine going out of her face.

"Mary had to go home to-day," said Mamma, "and you know, dear, it is a critical day with Bessie. I shall not leave her, and the house must be kept very still."

"Well; I suppose they can stay with me," said Grace rather ungraciously, adding: "Boys, bring your playthings into the library."

"But, my dear," said Mamma, hesitating, "I hate to spoil your pleasure to-day; but you know if you open a book, you will forget your charge."

"Not look at my new books!" exclaimed Grace. "Oh, I couldn't possibly help it! I won't forget."

"Grace," said her mother, gravely, "I know you too well, and it is my particular request that you do not even open one of your books to-day. I know it's hard," she went on, seeing the look in Grace's face; "but the life of your sister may be the forfeit."

"Hard!" cried Grace, hotly; "I think it's horrid!" and she rushed out of the room before her mother could say another word. She hurried into the library, flung herself into the blue chair, and burst into angry tears.

"I think it's just horrid!" she sobbed, violently. "It's bad enough to take care of those two young-ones without giving up my books!"

"But you know, Grace Houghton," said something within—"you know you'd forget them."

"What if I did for a tiny minute," she burst out in reply to her own thoughts; "they couldn't turn the house over in a minute."

"No; but they could throw down a table, as they did yesterday, suggested the monitor within; and a sudden shock, the doctor says, might kill Bessie."

"There's one good thing," said Grace suddenly, sitting up and looking fondly at the books she still held in her arms, "she didn't say I should not; she only 'requested' me not to."

"But you wouldn't disobey a request of Mamma's," was the next thought, on which Grace turned red and looked very sulky indeed.

Just then the door opened, and the two boys and a load of playthings were brought in and deposited, with the message:

"Your mother said I was to bring these to you, Miss Grace."

Well; that was not a very promising opening for Christmas morning, to be sure, and it stayed dismal for some time. Grace sat in the blue chair, very cross and sulky, and the twins, five years old and very lively, played with their toys on the floor. Every few minutes Grace had to interfere a sharp "Boys, do be still!" "Harry, stop dragging that train across the floor!" "Willie, don't climb on that table!" and so on; but in spite of these efforts, a good deal of noise was made in the room.

The fall of a chair at last fully aroused her; she sprang up—

"Grace Houghton," she said warmly. "I'm ashamed of you! do you want to never see your sister again? Do you care more for a story-book than you do for Bessie?"

Resolutely she crossed the room, opened a drawer in the book-case, laid her precious books in, shut it and locked it, put the key in her pocket, and turned to the twins who had just arranged a street car with chairs, and were ready for a lively time.

"Dear! dear! what shall I do with them?" she thought, glancing out of the window as she passed it. "I must get up something quiet to amuse them, and vacantly her eyes wandered over the scene outside, the whole world covered with snow, and glittering in the warm sunshine. Something she saw gave her the idea.

"I know!" she suddenly exclaimed; "that'll do, I'm sure! Boys, let's have a Christmas party."

"When? where? Who'll we invite?" came quickly from the pair, who left their own play at once.

"We'll have it as soon as we can get ready," said Grace, lively enough now, "and we'll invite—let me see"—she hesitated, "all the Grays, and the Browns, the Big Blue, and the two Topknots—and"

"Oh, I know!" shouted Harry, "the birds!"

"Yes, the birds!" said Grace. "You see the snow has covered up everything they have to eat, and I'm sure they'll come here on the lawn where we always find them. There's one now—see him?"

"I do!" cried Willie, "a robin! he's waiting for crumbs."

"Well, now, Bobby," speaking to the bird perched on a low tree, and evidently looking at them in the window, "we'll invite you to dinner; and all the rest of the birds out there"—waving her hand toward the woods, which came quite near the house—"in about an hour. Please tell everybody to come."

"Tut! tut!" said the robin, with a flirt of his tail.

"Hear him answer you!" cried Harry, laughing.

"Peep! tut! tut! tut!" went on the robin.

"Yes; you'll have to wait till the table's set," said Grace in reply. "We'll—boys!" with a sudden thought, "we'll make them a Christmas tree! you know John got one for us, that we couldn't use because of

Bessie. I'll get him to cut it off, and we'll fix it up for the birds."

"Oh, what a funny tree!" cried the boys; "what'll we put on?"

"You'll see," said Grace. "I don't know myself yet, but something they'll like! Now will you sit still as two mice while I go and see if we can have the tree?"

They both promised, but she took care to give them a new picture-book to look at while she was gone. Before they had exhausted their book she came back, and John behind her with the tree, or rather the top of it. He had saved it off about four feet high, and fitted it into the stand made for it, so that it stood up nicely.

"Now, what shall we put on?" began Willie, tossing the book aside.

"Well, what do we give the birds?" asked Grace.

"Seeds" said Willie, "and crumbs—and—"

"And bones," burst in Harry.

"Yes; and meat," said Grace.

"Meat?" cried Harry.

"Why, yes! doesn't Bobby there eat worms all summer on the lawn, and ar'n't worms meat, I'd like to know?" said Grace; "and you know there's lots of little fellows eat meat. You remember little Quanky who's always going round and round, knocking at the doors and jerking out the little grubs in the trees?"

"Yes," said Harry, with wide-open eyes, "and 'Boy Blue'! Don't you 'member what a long worm he had one day? longer'n he was."

"An 'Foxie,' 't used to jump so after grasshoppers," chimed in Willie.

These children knew so much about birds, you must know, because their mother was very fond of them, and told the boys their names, what they ate, and many things about them.

For half an hour there were three very busy pairs of feet in that house, as Grace and the boys collected their Christmas gifts; but at the end of that time everything was piled on the library table, and the work of decoration began. Little boxes made of paper were tightly tied on the branches in many places, to hold the seeds; stems of wheat and oats dried for winter bouquets were bound with thread on the ends of the twigs. Grace even added some heavy, drooping stems of rice in the shell, which Uncle Ben had brought her as a curiosity from Georgia, because she knew a certain fellow in a gray coat who especially delighted in that. Fresh raw beef that the cook good-naturedly cut from a steak was snipped with scissors into tiny strips a half-inch or more long, and not much bigger than a pin. Some of these imitation worms were wedged in among the leaves of the tree, and others tied loosely in a bundle and hung on a branch. Two bones out of the same steak were firmly fastened to the small trunk of the tree. Bunches of bitter-sweet with bright red berries were arranged among the branches. All this, though done by eager fingers, took a long time, and then Grace brought out a cupful of dried currants that had been soaking in hot water all this time. Now they were all plumped out and soft, and she set the happy and busy boys to sticking them on to the sharp, needle-like leaves of the tree.

This was a slow operation, and very droll that tree looked, I can tell you, all blossomed out with dried currants. The last thing was to fill the little boxes with hemp seed, cracked wheat, coarse oatmeal, canary and millet seed, and then, to their great surprise, it was time for luncheon.

When that was over John was called in, and the whole thing carefully carried out and placed on the lawn before the window, just where the birds were used to being fed. Then a dishful of water was set under the tree.

"Will they take a bath?" asked eager Harry.

"No; it's too cold," said Grace; "but they'll want a drink, you know; and now we'll sit in the window and see who comes to our party."

She placed a chair for each.

Hardly were they seated before the fun began.

"There comes Bobby!" from Willie announced the first arrival. Sure enough, a robin, perhaps the one who had been invited, alighted on a shrub beside this strange new Christmas-tree. He looked at it; he flirted his tail; he jerked his body

and slapped his wings down on his side, and at last came down on the snow to see what he could make of it. He ran all around it, in little short runs, stopping and lifting his head every minute to see if anything had happened while he was not looking. He came closer, then something caught his eye—a bone! yes; he knew a beefsteak bone; he'd seen them before; he boldly pounced on the lowest branch, and attacked that bone as if he had not eaten meat in a month. He shook the tree so that some of the seeds were spilled, but that didn't matter, the birds would like them just as well from the snow.

The boys were so taken up with Bobby's performances that they had not noticed another arrival, till Grace called "chick-a-dees!" and there they were, a little flock, all in black caps and white vests as trim as dandies. They flew back and forth two or three times, then alighted on the snow around the tree, and devoted themselves to picking up what Master Bobby had scattered. Very busy and sociable they were too, chattering and eating as fast as they could and calling their thanks in lively "chick-a-dee-dees" when they were ready to go.

"Oh, who's that?" cried the boys, as a stranger appeared on the lawn. He was dressed in a neat suit of bluish brown, and he gravely walked over the snow to see what the excitement was. He came on in a droll, little mincing way, bobbed his head at every step, and when he reached the tree he turned his funny little head up and looked at Bobby still working away at that bone, chuckling to himself as though this was the very oddest thing he had seen yet.

"That's a turtle-dove," said Grace, when she got a good sight of him; "isn't he pretty?"

"What'll he eat?" asked Bobby.

"I don't know; we'll see," said Grace. And they did; for he began to pick up the seeds from the snow in a doubtful way, as though he suspected they might be poisoned. But he did not stay long, for now came a very noisy party in rusty-black, with faded red shoulder-straps. They were only three or four, but they made noise enough for a dozen. The dove walked off with great dignity, and Bobby took flight in a hurry.

One of the new-comers said "Chack! chack!" another uttered a loud scream, and a third said "Whew!" and they all bustled around as if they hadn't a minute to stay, and had a great deal to talk about. After some little study of the tree, they pounced on it in a body, and the way the catables disappeared in those long, black bills was alarming.

"They won't leave a thing," said Willie.

"See how they shake the things out!" said Harry.

"And look at them stuffing themselves!" added Willie; "let's scare 'em away!"

"Why, what for?" said Grace; "didn't we invite them all? These redwings don't seem to have very fine table manners; but they're having a good time anyway, and we can fill up the boxes again."

The redwings ate their fill, sang a song or two, dipped freely into the water, and then left.

For a few minutes the tree was deserted, and then came a lipping group. They alighted on the Christmas-tree without fear, they fell at once to eating of the feast they found there, and had a good deal to say about it, but never a word above a soft, hissing whisper—it was droll enough. They were very handsome in olive-colored dress with black spectacles, tall pointed caps and brilliant red tags on their wing feathers.

"Cherry birds!" the boys cried.

"Cedar birds," said Grace.

While they were enjoying their silent luncheon, another guest came in, even more silent, for the three hosts in the window did not see him till he flashed around the trunk of the little tree, and gave a long, rattling knock as though he expected a door to open and a grub to walk out.

"Oh, there's Downy!" was announced, and just that minute he caught sight of one of the bits of meat cut to look like tiny worms. He helped himself, and liked it so well that he took another, and another, and then rapped his thanks and disappeared the way he had come.

Next came down a flock of sparrows, chirping and chattering like a party of