

hood, away doing for themselves, and then there were joyful home-comings at Christmas times.

Then there came the time when Edith had married and been taken to her own home in the big city four hundred miles away. John, too, soon afterwards—the first break in Christmas home-coming. Will and David had come only once since that, but it was so unlike the old home-comings. Then the mother had died suddenly, and they had not been home for five years now.

Rousing himself from his reverie, he got up and stood at the side of the table, looking out of the window into the night. Standing with his face close to the window, he could see the snow falling gently, great large flakes of feathery down, a short stretch of roadway, and the village cobbler's cottage beyond in its little garden enclosure. It was now nine. Suddenly the light went out in a small window in the cottage. The village shoemaker and his family had retired for the night.

He heard the sound of the merry jingle of sleigh bells coming up the road from the direction of the lower end of the village. His heart almost stood still as he turned his eyes down that way. A fond longing was in his bosom. A sleigh load of happy young people dashed into his range of vision and sped by on its way to a surprise party, all waving their hands at him and shouting, "Merry Christmas, Doc!"

He waved his hand back to them as they darted out of sight.

"Well, I guess I'll fix up the fire and go away to bed myself," he sighed, "but I do wish one of the boys had come home."

He turned and his eye caught the letter lying open on the table. He put down his pipe, took out his spectacles, replaced the case in the upper right hand pocket of his waistcoat, drew out his handkerchief and wiped both lenses, adjusted them to his eyes, took up the letter and began to read it as he had done before a half dozen times that evening, after getting it from the post office in the afternoon, when the stage brought the mail in from the neighboring town twelve miles distant.

It was from his daughter Edith, warmly pressing him to come and spend the Christmas holidays with them, as her husband could not leave his business on account of his clerks going away for the holidays. But the letter written a week before had been delayed in transmission, probably owing to the heavy Christmas mails. He might have gone, but it was too late now. There would be no train, and even if there had been he would have been loth to ask any one to drive him to the stage town on Christmas eve.