A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THE sun shone with a golden light in the sky; the snow shone with a white glare on the ground; the clear, cold air reddened the cheeks of the pedestrians, whose feet sank into the crisp snow with the crunching sound peculiar to zero weather as they hurried onward, listening to the lively little sleigh-bells, the deep, single notes of the church-bells, and the erratic chime of St. Nebat's, which, having lost its final note, persisted in running down the scale—do, si, la, sol, fa, mi, *re;* do, si, la, sol, fa, mi, *re*—until all the musicians within range, wrought up to frenzy by long-continued expectation, felt like opening the window and roaring out the missing final *do*. It was ten o'clock; breakfast was over, and I was amusing myself with Christmas decorations. The room was large, with a rich-hued carpet of small, mixed figures, crimson curtains, and a crystal chandelier filled with wax tapers; one or two vivid pictures stood out on the plain gray walls, and an easel held a little crayon sketch of two elves dragging a Christmas-tree across the snowy fields toward a lighted cottage beyond. In the centre of the room a round table was spread with a crimson cover, odd Chinese china, frosted glass, and just enough silver to light up the whole; while from the épergne, the mantel vases, the tops of the pictures, and the gilded scroll-work of the mirror, sprays and branches of holly, with its red berries, and hemlock, with its brown cones, clambered in gay profusion, filling the warm air with the fragrant odors of the forest. A few easy-chairs, a broad sofa, with heaps of Turkish cushions, and an upright piano, completed the furniture of the room; a recess, filled with shelves, held books, free to the touch and destitute of lock, glass, or cover—old friends worn with the long watches they had kept in kindly companionship through my otherwise lonely hours. Looking around my domain, I felt satisfied with the warmth, fragrance, color, light, and silent music of the whole. Although an old maid, and consequently forced at times to eat the legendary salad for the solitary, I did not mix it with the pronged malice, bladed severity, and acid temper ascribed to my class; but with health as firm as the hard-boiled egg, temper as even as the oil, and, above all, the crested silver fork of wealth, I cheerfully mixed my salad—for the solitary if need be, but for the social if friendly hospitality could accomplish the wish. This bright Christmas-day I expected Cousin Eva, Aunt Penelope, and a distant relative, Mr. Adam Brown, to dine with me. Lonely body that I was, I preferred to live in a city boarding-house, where space was necessarily limited, and one room served as parlor, library, and dining-room; but deft Lucy, black Tony, and the skilled cook of a neighboring restaurant managed to make my one room as pleasant as the long vistas of a palace, perhaps more so.

St. Nebat's kept at it; and as I equipped myself for the outside weather, and mentally supplied the missing *do*, Tony brought me a note.

"DEAR ALEXANDRINA,—A telegram just received from Adam. He can not leave Persepolis until to-morrow. Eva has a bad headache, and I do not like to leave her. You will be lonely: come and dine with us. In haste, PENELOPE WALLACK."

I was vexed. I was more than vexed; I was angry. I glanced at the holly, the wax-lights, and the glittering table; I silently enumerated the courses of my festal dinner. I wrote the following reply:

"DEAR AUNT PEN,—I am sorry you can not visit me to-day, but I shall not be lonely, as I have other guests invited. Yours in haste,

"ALEXANDRINA SPENCER."

St. Nebat's still rang its dislocated chime, and going out into the clear air, I joined the bustling throng all intent on Christmas, although its interpretation varied from sacred anthem to jovial chorus, from turkey and Champagne to sausages and lager, and from an æsthetic discussion to a billiard match. Still angry, I entered St. Nebat's open door, and seated myself in a corner of my pew. The chime ceased, and the organ pealed forth a joyous strain, as a host of children standing in the aisles walked forward, singing their Christmas Carol. Though poorly dressed, and showing many wan and sickly faces among their ranks, the little voices rang cheerily out in a genuine child's tune, that almost sang itself along by sheer force of the swinging melody:

"Carol, carol, Christians,
Carol joyfully;
Carol for the coming
Of Christ's nativity;
And pray a gladsome Christmas for all good Christian men:
Carol, carol, Christians, for Christmas come again!"

A little lame girl filled her place in the ranks with earnest energy, singing sweetly as her crutches sounded on the stone floor. As she passed me a ray from the stained glass windows lit up her pale face, and the feeling came over me like a wave, "Do I repine, with health, friends, and fortune, while this poor waif, helpless and destitute, so cheerfully bears her hard lot?" When the children were seated the service began, and from the opening anthem to the closing benediction all breathed the spirit of Christmas. Glad music told the tidings of great joy, the royal Psalms and glowing pages from the Prophets were read, and the sermon made an appeal for charity—responded to by heaped contribution plates, not a hand refusing its mite on Christmas-day. Down the aisle and out into the street the thronging congregation whispered its greetings

and good wishes; sorrow seemed forgotten, and for once care seemed left behind. Finding the lame child with some difficulty, I endeavored to persuade her to return home with me. Blushing with timidity, little Jane murmured that Mrs. M'Niel might not like it.

"We will go and ask Mrs. M'Niel," I said, only the more determined as obstacles rose in my path; and taking the child in a carriage, we drove down into the business part of the town, and threading our way through lanes in the rear of sombre warehouses, stopped at a brick tenement-house which the child pointed out as "home." Following the sound of her crutches through the dark passages, I came at last to a small room, where a gaunt woman, introduced as "Mrs. M'Niel," received me with "An' what's yurr wull with Jane, ma'am?"

I explained that I had seen the child at church, and wished to take her home to dine with me.

"Oh, ye can take her an' welcome! It's not much use she is to me, with them legs. Her mother died in the next room an' left her a baby—the swatest lamb of the world as iver was, an' I hadn't the heart to turn her off. She's a good little thing, but she can't arn much, and me a-working me fingers to the bone, the mother of ten of me own."

Leaving a present for the ten, I hurried away from the wretched home, and, with Jane beside me, drove rapidly back into the airy avenue where I lived. "The mother of ten! the mother of ten!" kept ringing in my ears. A troop of ragged boys and lank girls seemed to file past me, and yet that overworked mother had found time and heart to pity the crippled orphan. I began to wonder how the great scales of compensation are balanced, and whether I should be found wanting when the ease and idleness of my life were weighed against me!

My warm room greeted me with a fragrant welcome. Never before had it seemed half so comfortable. But the other vacant places at the table must be filled; and leaving the wondering child ensconced in my easiest chair, I mounted to the fourth story of the boarding-house and knocked at one of the little doors in the circle, like a round-house, where a number of lodgers were stowed away at half price under the roof. A fat little woman appeared, and with some surprise invited me to enter. The cell contained a cot-bed, a bureau, one chair, and a tiny stove. The temperature must have been ninety, and there was no way of ventilation save by opening the one window, and sitting, as it were, out-doors in the freezing air. Miss Michon offered me the chair, seating herself upon the bed; and as I gave my invitation I could not help noticing, as I had often noticed before, how remarkably plain she was!

"Poor old lady," I soliloquized as I returned to my rooms below, "you, at least, have been spared the snares of Cupid. You, at least, know nothing of the bitter-sweet thought, It might have been!"

Here some one passed me, and looking up, I recognized Mr. Blunt, a young clerk, with whom I had never before exchanged a word, although he had been in the house for six months. He came and went with silent regularity, and beyond his name I knew absolutely nothing of his history or personal attributes. Obeying a sudden impulse, I invited him to dine with me. The young man turned back, bowed gravely, but courteously declined, with a trace of dignified reserve which did not displease me. Something in his dark eyes impressed me, and, curious to see more of them, I explained my situation, and with earnest cordiality begged my fellow-boarder to accept the vacant seat at my table. "I am but a lonely old maid, Mr. Blunt," I concluded. "Will you not help me to spend a merry Christmas?"

As I spoke the grave face relaxed, and after a moment's hesitation Mr. Blunt accepted the invitation, and I returned to my room as triumphant as a manager who has just secured a star of the first magnitude.

After lunch little Jane fell asleep on the sofa, and sitting by the window I watched the sleighs gliding by, and thought of the many spirits of Christmas Past—nearly fifty of them—some rosy with hope, some dark with disappointment; but the majority prosaic, even-tempered ghosts, not above an interest in the merits of the dinner. Perhaps a tear or two dimmed my eyes as an old enchanted memory stole into my heart; but I was obliged to confess that the last time I saw Edward he was unromantically stout, and Edward's wife—"manœuvring little wretch" of the past—seemed but a faded, care-worn woman of the present, with very little apparent happiness to rouse my regretful jealousy. Twilight came, little Jane awoke, Tony replenished the fire and lighted the tapers, and I consigned my ghosts to the past, as Miss Michon appeared, clad, of course, in a black silk, and looking plainer than ever. A few minutes before six Mr. Blunt came in, polite but rather silent. "Poor fellow," I thought. "He is embarrassed, no doubt. Probably he is from the country, and knows little of the world. I must try to draw him out."

When the last dish was in place upon the table my oddly assorted party took their seats, and Tony began his ministrations. For the purpose of making my guests feel at ease I made an effort to supply conversation, asking Miss Michon questions suited to her probable capacity, talking about the country to Mr. Blunt, and about the Sunday-school to little Jane. It was dull work. A

monologue is apt to be dull. But as Tony was removing the soup, who should appear but my delinquent guests! Adam had been "released, after all;" Aunt Pen feared I "should be lonely;" and Eva had miraculously "recovered from her headache." Here was a dilemma! Miss Michon fanned herself, little Jane stared at Eva, Mr. Blunt arose and stood by his chair, and I found myself the most embarrassed of the party. However, I made the best of it. "Three more plates, Tony. Excuse the crowded table, Aunt Pen. Miss Michon, allow me to introduce to you Mrs. Wallack, Miss Rose, and Mr. Brown."

Completing the introductions, with some difficulty all were seated, Eva next to Mr. Blunt, Aunt Pen between little Jane and myself, and Adam by the side of Miss Michon. It *was* funny, but I had no intention of laughing, and began to carve with dignity. The situation, however, was too much for Tony. He presented a plate to Miss Michon; snatched it away hastily, and placed it before Aunt Pen; took it back again, under the pretense of dusting it, and finally let it fall on my head in his vain efforts to decide the proper etiquette of the occasion. Jolly Miss Michon burst out into a peal of laughter, Eva joined, Aunt Pen yielded, the young men followed her example, and we all laughed until the tears stood in our eyes, beginning again and again as the embarrassed Tony, after diving for the pieces, thought it necessary to make a profound salam to each guest in token of his contrition. After this introduction, as may well be imagined, there was no constraint to mar the dinner; Eva chatted gayly with the clerk, Adam kept up a fire of repartee with Miss Michon, and Aunt Pen talked with little Jane as though she had known her for years. In a gustatory point of view the dinner was perfect; the fire glowed, the tapers shone brightly, the holly exhaled its spicy perfume, and the guests were merry. "Hail, mince-pie!" exclaimed Adam, as Tony brought him a piece of that goodly compound.

> "Without the door let sorrow lie,
> And if for cold it hap to die,
> We'll bury it in a Christmas-pie,
> And evermore be merry!"

"What is that you are quoting, Adam?" asked Aunt Pen.

"An old song of the fourteenth century. But why do you say 'quoting?' Am I not capable of wooing the Muse myself? I assure you I am brimful of poetic fire, and can gush right out at any time. I will give you a Christmas poem this instant, and not only that, but I will give it without the capitals. We had a Christmas dinner in 1871: if you only could have been there to hear and see the fun! Victoria sent her regrets—she really felt too chunky; but Darwin came, and brought with him his old ancestral monkey. Guy Lawrence Livingstone appeared, and brought 'ye ancient wassail;' but John Hay said he could not come unless we'd let him 'rastle.' The sweet Sorosis came in force, and fell into a spasm; and Huxley sent us each a slice of patent protoplasm. Chang, the giant, came with Barnum and Mrs. Tom Thumb tiny; and then, for something lively, we sent out West for Cheney; but lest the ministerial East with jealousy should burn, we invited, in a body, the Methodist Book Concern. Bergh could not leave his patent-preservation-tadpole tanks; and, from mere force of habit, the Eds. declined with thanks."

"I yield! I yield!" interrupted Aunt Pen; "any thing for peace. Hereafter, Adam, I will never question your genius, but admire your poetry with all my heart, provided you do not ask me to listen to it."

"I have always thought Adam's poetry pre-Raphaelite," observed Eva.

"Pre-Adamite," said Aunt Pen.

"Ex machina," suggested Mr. Blunt.

"A second Mr. Slum," exclaimed Miss Michon. "Indeed, I am not sure but that your allusion to Darwin is a base imitation of Slum's epic on Mrs. Jarley's wax-work show."

"And that reminds me," said Adam, "that the genius of Christmas is gone. Could we but collect together to-day those whose hearts he has comforted, whose gloom he has cheered, whose burden he has lightened, whose struggles he has encouraged, what a mighty company, of all ages and classes, would fill these streets, crowding each other to pay a farewell tribute to the beloved author! The critics might pipe their feeble strain on whatever note they pleased, but the people recognized and crowned their favorite; and on this Christmas-day there will be many a sigh over the missing Christmas story, and many a kindly memory of the man to whom Christmas was a real festival, full of love, peace, and good-will toward men. Friends, let us drink to the genius of Christmas—to the memory of our dear lost friend, Charles Dickens."

Tony filled our glasses, and with reverence we drank the toast. All but little Jane, who asked, timidly, "Who is Charles Dickens?"

"A writer, my dear, who loved little children and wrote about them," said Aunt Pen. "One of these children, a little boy called Tiny Tim, was something like you. At a Christmas dinner this little boy said, 'God bless us, every one.'"

"Amen!" said little Jane. She thought it was a prayer. Perhaps it was.

"What a pure essence of Christmas fills that story!" observed Eva.

"That is because there are children in it," answered Aunt Pen. "Children make Christmas what it is. I remember my baby niece,

little Plum, cherished a firm belief that Santa Claus lived up the chimney; and as Christmas drew near, and visions of possible gifts filled her little heart, she would go slowly and timidly to the fire, hesitate a moment, and then deliver a loud 'Tea-set!' up the chimney, running away instantly as fast as she could, with a vague fear of pursuit from the unknown deity. We used to hear her calling out these abrupt messages at all hours of the day: 'dolls,' 'No's yark,' 'yittle tart wid horses,' were fired up the chimney like minute-guns. Once, when she had been fretful, her mother endeavored to quiet her by the suggestion that Santa Claus might hear her. This seemed to have an effect. Miss Plum sat demurely on her little stool for some time, but finally the idea of an unseen sentinel became oppressive, and going to the grate she called out, 'Santa Claus, you needn't watch me any more; my mamma can take care of me.'"

We all laughed.

"That is like the little boy who could not go to sleep because those horrid angels watched his bed," said Miss Michon. "Poor children, how they are misunderstood! At Christmas time, for instance, some persons seem to think that an elaborate dinner is all that is necessary to make the little folks happy, when ten minutes gives them all the food they want, and the long hours become a torture."

"A Christmas dinner," began Aunt Pen, with didactic solemnity, "is an important event. Its component parts should be as carefully selected and mixed as those of a mince-pie. We all know that nine-tenths of the mince-pies are failures, and likewise of Christmas dinners. In the first place, children should only come in with the dessert; thus their little souls will not be tortured by the endless procession of dishes, and their little bodies worn with fatigue from sitting three hours in the same chair. Then, as regards the adults, they may be classed in two broad divisions—flirting people and eating people. For the first class we must have proper objects for admiration; for the second a perfectly cooked dinner. Who has not seen ladies yawning behind their fans, evidently thinking the dinner tasteless, because the spice of flirtation was lacking? Who has not seen gentlemen secretly watching the clock with weary ennui, when one pair of bright eyes would have shed radiance over the scene? Depend upon it, my friends, that as long as we ignore the fitness of things, as long as we refuse to provide proper attractions for the three classes of guests, our Christmas dinners will be melancholy failures."

"This one is a success, Aunt Pen," observed Adam, as he cracked the nuts. "All your three classes are here."

Eva drew herself up as she noticed the general smile, and turning to the clerk beside her, asked, with vivacity, "You have been in the army, I see, Mr. Blunt?"

Hastening to the relief of my protégé, I answered for him: "Eva, Mr. Blunt is still very young, and, besides, he may have had other and weightier duties to fulfill. Some of our warmest patriots could not give more than their earnest hopes to the cause."

But pretty Eva persisted. "I know I am right," she continued. "I am sure Mr. Blunt was a soldier. He has that erect, martial bearing which civilians never acquire."

Here Adam straightened himself involuntarily.

"You are right, Miss Rose," replied the clerk, quietly. "I served in the Union army during the rebellion, and but a moment ago I was thinking of the Christmas-day I spent in C—— prison."

"Tell us about it, please," asked Eva, eagerly.

"The war is over, Miss Rose, and the public interest in its details is already subsiding. It is best that it should be so: let us heal the wounds, rather than reopen them."

"My interest is not subsiding," exclaimed Eva; "and as long as this generation lives the memory of those heroic deeds will be held sacred, and thousands of unwritten histories, told by returned soldiers, will kindle again and again the old ardor. What exciting days they were! Living as we did far from the border, we caught only the echoes of the storm; sometimes a new regiment would pass through the city with waving banners and confident step; sometimes a train of cars filled with wounded and dying would halt in the dépôt, and we tried with food, cordials, and fruits to alleviate the sufferings of the men; but some were past help. How well I remember the thrill that passed through our hearts when in the early Sunday morning stillness came the newsboy's cry passing up the street—'Extra, extra; another great battle!' Were you in the Christmas battle of Stone River, Mr. Blunt?"

"No; I had not that glory. I was taken prisoner by Forrest while out on a scouting expedition, together with most of my company."

Again the young man paused; but when we all begged him to proceed, he at length consented, and spoke as follows:

"I was born in Ohio, and educated at one of the State colleges. Here, among others, I formed a friendship with Grove Seaton—a delicate boy, comparatively friendless, who suffered much from the petty persecutions of his turbulent companions. Grove took a fancy to me in his silent way, and I protected him from many an onslaught. We passed two years together, and then I left the school to enter upon business life; but in the midst of busy occupation I often thought of him, and wondered whether I should ever

see his pale face again. At the opening of the rebellion I volunteered, and was appointed captain in one of the Ohio regiments, my brother Jim, a mere lad, serving as private in the same company. As he was determined to go, I was glad to have him so near me. A campaign full of the hardship without the glory of war fell to our lot. We marched back and forth hundreds of miles through Tennessee and Kentucky, often traveling in a circle, and retracing our steps of the previous day, burning and rebuilding bridges, collecting supplies, guarding passes, acting as reserves, but never actually participating in any thing more than a skirmish with guerrillas and bush-whackers. Sometimes we hovered on the edge of the battle, and when it was over helped to bury the dead; but our numbers continued intact until a few days before Christmas, when my company, out on scouting duty, was surprised and captured by Forrest with a force of three times our number. This prince of raiders was a terror throughout the Western battle-fields. He rode through the country with such dashing speed, he possessed such accurate knowledge of our movements, and knew the ground so thoroughly, that he always held us at a disadvantage. We never knew exactly where he was, and he generally appeared at the very last place where he was expected. Always in a hurry, he wasted no time upon his prisoners, but sent them off South under guard. In this way we too were treated, and within an hour after our capture we were on the road to C—— prison, in Alabama. Once fairly started on our weary journey, we were stripped of our valuables, our clothes exchanged for ragged garments, our boots and shoes taken away, and thus, barefooted, we were hurried along over the rough roads, and forced to keep pace with our mounted guard. Gradually the food gave out. I do not think the Confederates were in fault, for provisions were scarce, and some expected supplies failed to appear; but we were soon reduced to a small piece of dry corn-bread for a whole day's rations, and starvation began to count its victims. Oh, you ladies and gentlemen living in the midst of plenty can form no conception of the horrors of real, gnawing hunger! Some of the men went raving mad, some dropped without a groan, and others, like my brother and myself, marched on with dull endurance, hardly knowing whether we were dead or alive. One cold morning found our miserable band within a few miles of C——. I remember some one said, 'It's Christmas at home to-day.' I had forgotten it, and raising my eyes at the words, I happened to catch a glimpse of Jim's face as he trudged by the side of a Confederate. Poor boy! The man was eating some bacon and corn-bread as he rode along, and Jim's hungry eyes followed every morsel with the pathetic earnestness of a starving dog. He did not speak, but kept up with the horse, never dropping his gaze, although the road was full of pitfalls, as though fascinated by the very sight of the food. The mute appeal of his white, hollow face, and the thought that it was Christmas-day, overcame me, and the first tears of my manhood rolled down my cheeks.

"Toward noon we were marched into C—— prison. It was an open lot, encircled by a high fence, and crowded with ragged, dirty, and sickly prisoners, some of them looking more like savages than civilized Americans. A rough shed ran along one side of the fence, but as only a small portion of the men could be crowded within its limits, by far the larger number were exposed to the weather, and consequently were suffering from low fever and diseases of the lungs. As we entered this abode of misery we were immediately surrounded by the gaunt inhabitants, and overwhelmed with questions. Most of them seemed half crazed; but the saddest spectacles of all were those who sat apart, sternly hopeless, waiting for the deliverance of death.

"During the afternoon a rumor passed through the prison that food was coming. By this time the horrors of the scene had sunk deeply into my mind, my courage fell, and I knew I could not long endure such a life. Having carried Jim to a corner, I sat down beside him. The boy was somewhat delirious, and I almost wished I could change places with him, for then I need not think. There was one at home who would hear of my capture. Need I say my thoughts were of her?"

At this point Adam awakened to a new interest in the story.

"The food came at last. Bad as it was, hunger rendered it palatable. Even Jim revived a little; and one of my company, a young man from the same town, confided to us his intention of trying to escape during the night. It was like running the gauntlet of a thousand deaths; but he was not to be persuaded from his purpose; so I gave him a penciled note, breathing a courage I myself was far from feeling, to take to my darling— I beg your pardon; the word slipped out by mistake," stammered Mr. Blunt, with a scarlet face.

"No mistake at all," exclaimed Adam, as we all laughed, and the sympathetic Miss Michon wiped her eyes. "It is the sweetest word in the English language, and I often use it myself."

Here there was another laugh, and more blushes besides those of the young soldier, who hastened on with his story.

"The man got away that night; but, of course, we could not tell whether he was alive or dead. A cold rain set in, and Jim sank rapidly. Morning dawned, and anoth-

er wretched day opened before us. I tried to occupy myself in making a wooden fork and plate, so as to save every crumb of our scanty allowance of food; but as the cold increased, and our wet clothes grew stiff, I gave it up, and, throwing myself down beside Jim, I tried to pray. I was roused by a hand on my shoulder, and looking up I saw a Confederate officer, accompanied by a surgeon, who was ministering as far as he could to the necessities of the sick.

"'Are you ill, my man?' he asked.

"'No, but my brother is;' and I attempted to raise Jim's head. The officer stooped to assist me, and as our eyes met we recognized each other. It was Grove Seaton, my school-mate.

"I need not tell the details of the rest. We were taken from the prison, clothed, warmed, and fed, so that in a few days Jim, with youthful elasticity, recovered sufficient strength to travel. We were then immediately exchanged, and sent North through the lines, reaching home but a few days after my little note was received; for the man got through, after all. And so we escaped, while thousands were left to suffer. What a strange chance it seems!"

"I do not call it a chance," said Aunt Pen, solemnly. "It was the direct reward of your kindness to that friendless boy."

Aunt Pen likes to point a moral.

"What a Christmas!" shuddered Miss Michon. "But I am glad she got the note."

"Fill the glasses, Tony," said Adam. "Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink to the health of 'Darling,' wherever she is, and may we all have the pleasure of meeting her in person before another Christmas comes round."

"Give her this from me, Mr. Blunt," said Eva, slipping a ring from her slender finger.

"And now," said Aunt Pen, after another half hour had glided away, "it's after midnight, and little Jane's eyes look sleepy. Come, my dear, put on your hood: I shall take you home with me."

Then followed a general exchange of adieux. As I assisted Aunt Pen in arranging her numerous wrappings, I whispered, "Do you really mean to take little Jane with you?"

"Why not, Sandie? Your description of the poor child's home dwells in my mind. Eva will probably leave me before many months, and I must have something young about me. I have taken a fancy for little Jane, and, besides, I think a good surgeon could cure her lameness. But be that as God wills; I like the lassie, and will take her as my Christmas present."

"Mr. Blunt," said Adam, as he shook hands with the young soldier, "our acquaintance is of too recent date for me to press myself upon you; but I trust that we shall be friends from this day; and as you are a comparative stranger in the city, you must allow me to do something toward advancing your interests here, as I have many acquaintances among the merchants. Who knows," added Adam, with a smile in his brown eyes, "but we two forlorn bachelors may keep next Christmas in homes of our own, with our dar—" Here the reprobate was ignominiously dragged away, and we lost the conclusion of the sentence.

"Who, indeed?" said Mr. Blunt, as he took leave of me. "The future is uncertain; but I have to thank *you*, Miss Spencer, for a very happy Christmas."

"Not so happy as the next one will be, Mr. Blunt, if two friends can bring it about," I answered.

How the grave face brightened, and what a warm pressure my old hand received!

"Isn't he sweet!" exclaimed Miss Michon, as we two were left alone. "He reminds me so much of my poor lost Archie."

"Your brother?" I asked, as she wiped her eyes.

"Oh no! my lover. He died at sea. We were to have been married as soon as the voyage was over. I have my wedding-dress still. I will show it to you some day. See, here is his picture," she continued, taking off a locket and opening it. A bright, manly face, with clustering brown hair and deep blue eyes, gazed at me from the ivory.

"And who is this on the other side?" I asked, seeing the fair, dimpled face of a lovely young girl.

"That is myself, taken at sixteen. Poor Archie! But I know he is happy, and waiting for me; so I never weep and lament. He never liked to see me sad. Well, good-night, Miss Spencer. I have had a charming Christmas; and I only wish you could have known my Archie."

"At least I may know you," I replied, kissing the cheery little woman. "We will keep each other from feeling lonely, my dear."

"We will, we will!" cried Miss Michon. And she was as good as her word.

St. Nebat's clock struck one as I stood alone by the dying fire, and thought over the events of the day. The simple words of an ancient carol came unbidden, and sang their quaint music through my brain:

"I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas-day, on Christmas-day;
I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas-day in the morning.
Oh, they sailed into Bethlehem
On Christmas-day, on Christmas-day;
Oh, they sailed into Bethlehem
On Christmas-day in the morning.

"And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas-day, on Christmas-day;
And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas-day in the morning.
And all the angels in heaven shall sing
On Christmas-day, on Christmas-day;
And all the angels in heaven shall sing
On Christmas-day in the morning."