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"THE WIND IS CHILL; BUT LET IT WHISTLE AS IT WILL, WE'LL KEEP OUR MERRY CHRISTMAS STILL."

THE HAPPIEST CHRISTMAS.

BY MARGARET J. PRESTON.

TWAS Christmas-tide. With tales and talk
That never seemed to tire,
The children, gay with holiday,
Sat round the blazing fire.

They told of many a prank and game,
And many a Christmas past,
And questioned me if this would be
As merry as the last.

"Of all your Christmas-times," I said,
"So rich in mirth and fun,
I beg that you each tell me true
Which was the happiest one."

Sweet Bessie turned her radiant face
With wondering gaze on me:
"My Christmas days have been always
As glad as glad could be."

Then merry Mabel shook her curls
Loose from the prisoning comb:
"Oh, mine was when papa and Ben
And you and Bess came home."

Ben chuckled, "'Twas the time I had
With crackers such a lark;
I popped and popped, and never stopped
From daylight until dark."

"That was the best," laughed Willoughby,
"Of any that I know,
When Roan and Bay upset the sleigh,
And drowned us in the snow."

"Such fun it was to see the girls,
And hear them shriek and shout,
To search and sift the ten-foot drift
Until we fished them out!"

"And I," lisped little Dimple-cheek,
A-tiptoe in her glee,
"Was happiest when I counted ten
Dolls on my Christmas tree."

The soft-eyed Sophie silent sat,
Nor yet had said a word,
Though I could see some memory
Her tender bosom stirred.

"What is it, darling?" and I kissed
The lids that veiled the blue;
"Tell me, I pray, what Christmas Day
Brought greatest joy to you."

The eyes she raised to mine were filmed
With something like a tear,
And sweet and low she answered, so
That I could scarcely hear:

"Last Christmas Day, with all my gifts
Upon the window-seat,
I watched right long the merry throng
Of people in the street.

"And as I watched there stood a group
Of ragged girls and boys
Before the pane, their eyes astrain
With wonder at my toys.

"Poor little foreign wanderers!
My eyes began to fill;
I could not bear to see them there,
So sad and wan and chill.

"I swept my toys into my lap,
And, with a tap and call,
Opened the door, and bade the four
Come to me in the hall.

"They held their aprons, stretched their hands;
And, oh, it was a sight,
As out I poured my Christmas hoard,
To see their wild delight!

"Each Christmas as it passed has seemed
More happy than the rest,
But of them all I think I'd call
That one the very best."

THE "LONELY LADY'S" CHRISTMAS.

BY LUCY C. LILLIE.

Part II.

IT was Christmas-time again; Mrs. Vandyke was wondering if the season would ever cease to be so painful to her. She dreaded it, and yet she believed she faced it well; she imagined, like many other people, that the highest form of heroism was to endure and be silent. There was a light flurry of snow outside, and Mrs. Vandyke, who liked to see her servants enjoy themselves at such seasons, wondered if there would be much of a storm or a drift on the day itself. She moved over to the western window, while old Jonas Potter, her faithful servant, came in to light the lamps, and at this moment she caught sight of the long shed, with its flicker of candle-light briefly showing her the children's heads—the little group who were trying so hard to make things "feel like Christmas" for their poorer companions.

"What is it, Jonas?" Mrs. Vandyke asked, listlessly. The children had disappeared from view now; the shed looked dark again.

"It's those children, ma'am, if you please," said the old servant. "It's the queerest thing. I do believe they're getting up a Christmas tree for themselves in there."

And Jonas, quite respectfully, laughed.

Mrs. Vandyke turned around in surprise.

"Why, *who* are they?" she asked; and at that instant the front-door bell sounded; Jonas disappeared. Mrs. Vandyke waited, a little impatiently, for his return and the answer to her question, but it was fully five minutes before he re-appeared, and then his face betrayed a mixture of perplexity and amusement hard to conceal.

"Well, Jonas?" said Mrs. Vandyke.

The man had in his hand a damp-looking piece of paper, and he held it out with a funny twinkle in his eyes.

"If you please, ma'am," he explained, trying to look serious, "it was one of them very young ones; and it *is* a tree they're fixing up, and—"

But Mrs. Vandyke waited to hear no more; she let Jonas go away and relieve his feelings by a laugh in the kitchen with Joanna, the cook, and then she read the queer little letter the factory children had written her, over and over again, with a feeling of bewilderment, in the midst of which something new to her heart restrained the "lonely lady" from laughing outright, for it must be admitted that it was a very unusual and funny proceeding.

"We're a-goin' to have a Christmas-tree party in your shed, Missis," said the note, "and will you come to it, please?—seven o'clock on Thursday."

Always, I believe, there is a voice waiting in the unseen—in the outer light—to answer those questions of ours which come from the heart and belong to its better part. Mrs. Vandyke stood still a moment, no longer only surprised and amused. There was something in the poor little word of invitation that knocked gently on the very door of her heart—nay, woke into life the feeling which for weeks had been stirring within her mind that she perhaps had a part to fill toward others in this Christmas season; that it was not doing all her duty just to bow her head in submission or inactive endurance.

The quietest people are often those who act most rapidly on sudden impulses. Mrs. Vandyke rang the bell, and sent for Jonas's wife, her old housekeeper.

"Matilda," she said, decidedly, "bring my fur boots and my fur cloak and silk hood. I am going out."

Matilda gazed and wondered while she helped her mistress on with her warm wraps. Still greater was her surprise when the lady said: "Ask Jonas to get the lantern and come with me. I am going over to that shed. Do you know anything about those children, Matilda?"

"Why, 'm," said the housekeeper, smiling broadly, "it seems they're giving a Christmas party to some other poor