

What queer blossoms, and what strange fruit that oddest of Christmas trees did bear! There were festoons of pop corn, there were apples red, apples yellow, there were home grown walnuts gilded and some tied with fringed tissue paper; there were rings and twists of pale yellow molasses candy twirling around on their strings and the funniest family of rag dolls. Then there were plenty of bright paper flowers and crinkley balls, twists and curls. There were mittens and shoes, scarfs and kerchiefs. And each blossom and fruit, whether large or small, possessed an air of conscious pride which seemed to announce that all were home made, all were fashioned at home and of strictly home materials. Near the top of the tree hung a pretty motto worked in curled paper, framed in green. "God bless our absent father and our Home-made Christmas."

The days and nights of anxious labor spent in the preparation of that homely tree no one but Tom guessed; yet, if Parintha was weary and her eyes were dim with unshed tears, were not her loved ones happy and what mattered the rest? All would some day come right in God's own way.

And then, Parintha Ann, in her usual Christmas costume, stepped from behind the tree and began the distribution of the presents. She looked, as Tommy mischievously remarked in an aside to Sammy, "thumlier than ever, but as good as ever."

Her father's great coat of black wool, ragged and old as it was, because "Santa had so far to travel," she explained, and the old fur cap pulled down to meet the beard of cotton which covered her freckled cheeks, smothered her with its puffy immensity—this was her costume; and as she advanced she began to recite her doggerel, which was always a part of the Christmas doings.

There were plenty of bags of candies, the white frilled bags made from freshly-ironed cheesecloth, and if the candy was home made, and the rest of the sweets were ginger and fried cakes they were deliciously good, and every one there so agreed. Then, the little mother had a pair of bed shoes, knit from stout home-made yarn. And she likewise had a good winter's cloak, for which Parintha had paid almost a month's salary. But mother was always first with Parintha.

Serena had a blue fascinator to wear upon her pale brown hair, and it did look lovely on the apple bloom complexion. She also had a pair of pale blue mitts to wear with her new party dress, and Serena did not know that they were purchased with the money Parintha Ann had saved up to buy a pair for herself to cover these homely square hands of hers.

For Tommy, there were three books, and real treasures they were, too. There was the Book of Mormon, the story of the Book of Mormon, and the Arabian Nights; for Tommy had just begun to take an interest in such things and Parintha was determined he should be well equipped for the studies he desired to pursue.

Sammy had a pair of strong and well knit gloves, and he whistled as he drew them on, for he knew how good they would feel when he was out cold winter mornings doing his chores. He had also, a sled, and if it was a good home made one, it would last all the longer; he was delighted to get any kind of a sled. He said so to his brother Tommy who had secretly made the sled at his sister's

suggestion, and Tommy felt more than repaid for all his work.

Jenny's small eyes twinkled when she was presented with three rag dolls, two big ones dressed as the mother and father dolls, while a tiny rag baby hid itself in its big rag mother's arms, and looked out with wise painted eyes at Jenny's unbounded delight in quite the approved baby style.

The professor was not forgotten, and if his present was a neckerchief which had once seen service in Serena's maroon cashmere dress, it was so neatly hemmed, pressed and cleaned, that he was totally unconscious of its former service. His courtly bow as he received it was checked by Serena's interruption.

"Oh Rinth, how could you? That's what you wanted my old dress for, to make that neckerchief for the professor? Well, you are a great one!"

Parintha Ann's eyes flashed for a moment, but she had not fasted the whole day before for nothing, and so in a moment she went on with her doggerel, seemingly unmoved by her sister's impulsive remonstrance.

The presents were all given out, and there was nothing left upon the tree but the strings of pop corn, the red apples, the tissue paper flowers and the gilded walnuts. Not one present for Parintha Ann, Serena said, just then.

"Wait a moment; I have got something for the professor."

She returned in a trice, and with a pretty bow, presented to the astonished professor a most elegant affair of satin and velvet, which, she had to explain to him, was designed for a handkerchief holder.

He blushed clear up to his soft brown hair, and as it was not very thick and was well combed up real scholarly style a la pompadour, the red waves of color could be seen clear into the wavy masses.

As for himself, he had prepared a fine gift for the mother, and handed her with his own mild grace a pair of elegant kid gloves, while he drew from his pocket a small but exquisite doll for little Jenny. Nothing more, absolutely nothing more, not even a pencil for Serena or any other member of the family. He blushed again and again as he reflected upon his forgetfulness.

That evening after all the children were in bed, the Christmas dinner was over, the older people sat around the kitchen table. It was a bright cosy kitchen, and Parintha Ann in the buttery, washing dishes for her mother, as she always did when home from school, looked out at the group around the table,—sister, the professor and Tom, and wondered why her heart would persist in being heavy in spite of all her many blessings.

"But you know, our Rinth is one of the best girls in this world if she is kind o' odd. She just wouldn't have us go in debt for this Christmas, even if father would be willing and would settle it up when he comes back. But you bet your life, I wasn't going to be put off too close, and so I made her give me five dollars. She made all them things on the tree, out of things we had in the house, and I couldn't imagine what she was going to give me, though I knew it would be something nice. Rinth is the boss girl, when it comes to giving presents."

"Serena, don't call Rinthie Rinth, she can't bear it, 'said the mother." She don't mind Rinthie, but it makes her purty near mad to be called Rinth."

"Oh well, I won't. Do you hear Rinthie? I am talking about you."

Parintha rather savagely banged the spoons into the spoon drawer, as she answered.

"Oh yes, I can hear you. But I am used to being talked about."

"Well you should be glad of it; for we wasn't talking bad, we was only giving you taffy behind your back."

The professor's handsome face was somewhat clouded as he asked. "Did Miss Parintha make all those knit things and ornaments on the tree? How does she ever find time?"

"Oh Rinth's,—oh I forgot—Rinth's got lots of time. Me and Ma does the housework, you know, while she teaches school. And she gets heaps of time after she gets home. But I guess she sat up pretty late this month, for she was determined to have a home-made Christmas, and I think she did it up pretty slick. We're awful proud of our Rinth."

"Say, folks, can't you find something else to talk about?" asked the wretched subject of all their talk.

"Miss Serena, may I ask what you have sent to your father?"

"Oh I haven't sent anything. I only had a little money, and I had new shoes to get for myself. I knew Rinth would remember father, and, say—Rinth,—I mean Rinthie, what did you send pa?"

"I sent him ten dollars, and ma sent him a knit silk necktie, as he wrote he was needing one."

"Won't your father feel your forgetfulness of him?" asked the professor kindly of Serena.

The girl blushed a little, and looked embarrassed.

"Oh no," answered the mother for her. "Rinthie and I put in a pretty Christmas card with love from Serena, and pa will be quite satisfied, for he knows Rinthie makes all the money we have to spend, and Serena has no way to earn money."

"Say, Professor, do you like plated silver?" asked Tom, who had listened to the conversation, in spite of having his new book.

"Why, yes, if it is well plated and I can't get the genuine article," answered the young man. "Don't you know that our plated spoons are all wearing off, and I should think it would be jolly to have a set all silver, even if they were not such pretty shaped ones as these old plated ones."

"Indeed it would, and I quite agree with you. Good, old-fashioned silver is the best for all uses, for fashion is a mere matter of whim anyway."

"That's what I think, Professor."

"Why do you ask?" inquired the Professor.

"Oh, only to get your opinion on an important matter, that's all."

Serena must have felt ashamed of her rather embarrassing discussion of her sister's ways for when the professor went into the parlor to practice as was his evening custom, Serena begged Parintha to sit down and let her dress the mass of shining red brown tresses.

"I dont care if your hair is a little red, it is awful thick and long, lots nicer in that way than my own. And I want to see if I can't fix it up to go to the party New Year's Eve with me and the professor."

"I dont want to go, Serena, I haven't been asked."

"Oh well, you are going just the same, the professor told me that he meant to take you along, so that's as good as an invitation. She did not tell how often she had pushed herself