

TWO CHRISTMAS EVES.

It was Christmas Eve. One could not doubt that, in the great western city of C., on the night on which my story opens. The streets were crowded with gaily dressed people, smiling papas and mammas, uncles and aunts, laden with certain mysterious looking parcels of almost every shape and size; gay groups of happy children tripping along the lighted streets, or peering through the brilliantly-lit windows, where were temptingly displayed every description of toy that the ingenious brain and the cunning hand could devise. There were horses and carriages, soldiers with drums, steam engines, tea sets, doll house furniture, dolls that could reep, and open and shut their eyes to order, pictures, books, balls and marbles, queer grinning masks, funny or frightful; there were pyramids of white and sugared popcorn, nut, candies, luscious fruits, and great iced cakes that to look at made one hungry. Before one of these earthly Edens stood a ragged little street Arab, gazing with hungry eyes on the tempting display of goodies, such as his little mouth had never tasted, or was likely to taste for many a weary day. Business had been dull with Benny O'Langley that day. Gentlemen's boots were too busy transporting their owners back and forth through the crowded thoroughfares, to stop at the shrill cry of "Shine your boots, sir?" Eyes accustomed to the sight of want and misery, failed to read the signs of cold and hunger in the little pinched wan face. Hearts that beat under the warm silk, broadcloth and furs, were too full of anticipation of their own home comfort and joy, or too occupied with their own business cares, to bestow a thought on a little boot-black, who pressed his pitiful little face closer against the shop window, all absorbed in the great longing to carry just one cake home to the hungry little sister Katie, or one of those cool looking oranges to the sick father, who but a week ago, had been crippled by a passing train as he was coming home from his work through the smoke and mist of the early night. So absorbed was he in this thought, that the hour passed unheeded by him, till the lights in the shop were suddenly extinguished, and he was awakened, as it were, from his dream, by a rude shove and the rough voice of a policeman bidding him move on. He gathered up his stock in trade, and moved on toward that part of the city, where the streets grow narrower and darker, and where awaited helpless loved ones, whose clamoring want his eager hoard of pennies could but ill supply. As he stumbled over something in his pathway, and stooping down, by the light of the moon that at that instant struggled through the clouds, he discovered a little child, fast asleep—a situation very dangerous on such a bitter cold night, as Bennie very well knew. The cloak and hood that had enveloped the little form were of the richest material and trimmed with fur; there were traces of tears on the plump, dimpled cheeks; so Bennie decided that she was some "rich body's" little darling, who had strayed from home and cried herself to sleep on the cold pavement. It was growing late, and no guardian of the peace was at hand, so Bennie carefully wrapped his tattered old coat about her, and carried her home, where the little wanderer was received with many exclamations of wonder and pity by the warm Irish hearts of its humble inmates. "Sure an' it must ave been a special providence," said good Molly O'Langley, "that sint that washin' to me just at this time, when that blessed little angel has been sent to us from heaven, an' you having such bad luck, me poor b'y."

was still an inmate of the Irish family. The pet and the tyrant for whom the warmest corner and the daintiest morsel were reserved, gradually she became reconciled to her new home, frolicing with little Kate O'Langley, and day by day her remembrance of "home, Auntie May, and Dr. John" became less distinct. The story that Dimple could not tell was this: She lived in a beautiful suburban residence with her Aunt Mary. Dr. John, known in society as J. McDonald, M. D., was their next door neighbor, and the very particular friend of Aunt Mary—otherwise Miss Mary Connors. Dimple was Dr. John's special pet and almost constant companion. On the afternoon of that day she was lost. She had a petitioned for a "yide," and it had been granted on the condition she should sit still in the sleigh, while Dr. John called on his patient, a seamstress in a tenement house in an obscure street in the city. Dimple promised, but like too many other Dimples, forgot all about it, when an organ grinder, with some dancing wax figures and a monkey, came by. She scrambled out of the sleigh, and mingled with the crowd of ragged little followers of the "funny monkey man." She solemnly promised herself that she would "come yite back in a minute." After a long time, which seemed but a moment to Dimple, she discovered that she was tired, and concluded to come back to the sleigh, but that was not so easily accomplished. She wandered farther and farther away, until night settled down, and, tired and discouraged, she curled down on the pavement and silently cried herself to sleep. The frantic search made by her friends, for some reason, proved unsuccessful. Poor Aunt Mary, from her first wild grief, settled down into a state of dumb despair that was terrible to witness. Dr. John, severely censuring himself for his carelessness, and unable to bear the silent reproach in Aunt Mary's wan face, started out to prosecute a fruitless search for the lost darling, whom everyone said was kidnapped by some unprincipled party in the hope of a reward, or to bring her up as a street beggar. Though untold heartaches and weary waiting, a year had passed away, bringing the repetition of the festive scenes, the joy, the light, the mirth—and God help the poor—also the want and misery that every Christmas time had witnessed since the coming of the blessed Christ-child was heralded by the host of shining ones to the humble shepherds watching their flocks on Judea's plain. The calm, pale mistress of the "Connors Mansion" was preparing, for almost the first time in the past year to go out. Of almost endless variety were the parcels packed around her in the ample sleigh. Presents for her numerous friends? Perhaps so. But if they were, what peculiar notions of appropriate gifts Miss Connor must have had, or else what very odd friends! For there were comfortables, flannels, and calicoes, stout shoes, besides sundry parcels of tea, sugar and dried fruit, and a sack of flour. And as the kitchen girl Katie took her place in the front seat beside the driver, she said to him: "Sure, Pat, and ye ain't afther forgettin' the bag of parates, that poor Mike and the babies couldn't get on widout at all, at all!" To satisfy the curious we will explain that very morning Katie being discovered by her mistress in tears and lamentations, had informed her that her "poor brother Mike an' his wife Mollie, bliss their swate souls, and three as illigant children as ever brathed the blissed air of free Ameraky, who had his legs cut clane off above the knees by a stame injun, bad luck to the bastly, murderin' machine a year ago, could get no work; and Binny, the swate child, wid a sprained ancle, and the dear lady as furnished Molly wid washing moved away, and them blissed babies crying for bread and not a crust or a parate to give them at all, at all." And so it happened that Miss Mary in her sweet pity for her humble brother and sister in distress, put as'de for the time, all thought of her own cherished sorrow, and went forth to minister to the comfort of the unfortunate around her. And she found her reward. You have guessed here now, dear reader, what a jewel she found in that humble Irish home. Her darling dimple peacefully sleeping, cheek to cheek,

with little Katie in their little bed of straw, covered with the best the house afforded. Dollie's well-worn, but clean old shawl, and Bennie's tattered jacket, while they huddled around an almost fireless hearth. You have anticipated the joy of the meeting, the promise to the O'Langley's of future employment and plenty, the happy ride home in the rosy twilight, the petting and spoiling of the recovered Dimple, of the telegram that flashed out its joyful tidings to an adjoining city, and—but I leave you to imagine the return of Dr. John that very night—if he did return, and the reconciliation, if there was one. The lights shone, the bands played, the shop windows displayed their glittering treasures, the busy, happy people came and went as if nothing had happened. But who shall doubt that far above the stars the herald angels did not look down and smile as they mingled their joyful voice in a song of praise that the stray lamb had returned to the fold? We know that when the church bells chimed out the welcome on that glad Christmas morn, from at least two warm hearthstones was echoed the joyful cry of, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."—Mina Badger in *Western Rural*.

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