

FINLEY MARTHA

CHRISTMAS WITH
GRANDMA ELSIE

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CHAPTER I

It was about the middle of November. There had been a long rain storm, ending in sleet and snow, and now the sun was shining brightly on a landscape sheeted with ice: walks and roads were slippery with it, every tree and shrub was encased in it, and glittering and sparkling as if loaded with diamonds, as its branches swayed and tossed in the wind. At Ion Mrs. Elsie Travilla stood at the window of her dressing-room gazing with delighted eyes upon the lovely scene.

"How beautiful!" she said softly to herself; "and my Father made it all. 'He gives snow like wool: he scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels.'

"Ah, good morning, my dears," as the door opened and Rosie and Walter came in together.

"Good morning, dearest mamma," they returned, hastening to her to give and receive the affectionate kiss with which they were accustomed to meet at the beginning of a new day.

"I'm so glad the long storm is over at last," said Rosie; "it is really delightful to see the sunshine once more."

"And the beautiful work of the Frost king reflecting his rays," added her mother, calling their attention to the new beauties of the ever attractive landscape spread out before them.

Both exclaimed in delight "How beautiful, mamma!" Rosie adding, "It must be that the roads are in fine condition for sleighing. I hope we can go."

"O mamma, can't we?" cried Walter. "Won't you give us a holiday?"

"I shall take the question into consideration," she answered with an indulgent smile; "we will perhaps discuss it at the breakfast table: but now we will have our reading together."

At that very time Capt. Raymond and Violet in her boudoir at Woodburn, were also discussing the state of the roads and the advisability of dispensing with school duties for the day that all the family might enjoy the rather rare treat of a sleigh-ride.

"You would enjoy it, my love?" he said inquiringly.

"Very much – in company with my husband and the children," she returned; "yet I would not wish to influence you to decide against your convictions in regard to what is right and wise."

"We will go," he said, smiling fondly upon her, "I can not bear to have you miss the pleasure; nor the children either for that matter, though I am a little afraid I might justly be deemed weakly indulgent in according them a holiday again so soon: it is against my principles to allow lessons to be set aside for other than very weighty reasons; it is a matter of so great importance that they be trained to put duties first, giving pleasure a secondary place."

"But they are so good and industrious," said Violet, "and the sleighing is not likely to last long. It seldom does with us."

"And they have been so closely confined to the house of late, by the inclemency of the weather," he added. "Yes: they shall go; for it will do them a great deal of good physically, I think, and health is, after all, of more consequence for them than rapid advancement in their studies."

"I should think so indeed," said Violet. "Now the next question is where shall we go?"

"That is a question for my wife to settle," returned the captain gallantly. "I shall be most happy to accompany her wherever she decides that she wishes to be taken."

"Thank you, sir. I want to see mamma, of course."

"Then we will call at Ion, and perhaps may be able to persuade mother to join us in a longer ride."

"Oh couldn't we hire an omnibus sleigh and ask them all to join us? It would just about hold the two families."

"It is a trifle odd that the same idea had just occurred to me," he remarked pleasantly. "I will telephone at once to the town, and if I can engage a suitable sleigh, will call to Ion and give our invitation."

The reply from the village was satisfactory; also that from Ion, given by Grandpa Dinsmore, who said he would venture to accept the invitation for all the family without waiting to consult them.

The captain reported to Violet, then passed on into the apartments of his little daughters. He found them up and dressed, standing at the window of their sitting-room gazing out into the grounds.

"Good morning, my darlings," he said.

"Oh good morning, papa," they cried, turning and running into his outstretched arms to give and receive tenderest caresses.

"What were you looking at?" he asked presently.

"Oh! oh! the loveliest sight!" cried Lulu. "Do, papa, come and look," taking his hand and drawing him toward the window. "There, isn't it?"

"Yes; I have seldom seen a finer," he assented.

"And the sun is shining so brightly; can't I take a walk with you to-day?" she asked, looking coaxingly up into his face.

"Why, my child, the walks and roads are sheeted with ice; you could not stand, much less walk on them."

"I think I could, papa, if – if you'd only let me try. But oh don't look troubled, for indeed, indeed, I'm not going to be naughty about it, though I have been shut up in the house for so long, except just riding in the close carriage to church yesterday."

"Yes; and I know it has been hard for you," he said, smoothing her hair with caressing hand.

Then sitting down he drew her to one knee, Gracie to the other.

"How would my little girls like to be excused from lessons to-day and given, instead, a sleigh-ride with papa, mamma, Max and little Elsie?"

"Oh ever so much, papa!" they cried, clapping their hands in delight.

"How good in you to think of it!"

"Specially for me, considering how very, very naughty I was only last week," added Lulu, in a remorseful tone. "Papa, I really think I oughtn't to be let go."

"And I really think I should not be deprived of the pleasure of having my dear eldest daughter with me on this first sleigh-ride of the season," returned her father, drawing her into a closer embrace.

"And it would spoil all the fun for me to have you left at home, Lu," said Grace.

"And that must not be; we will all go, and I trust will have a very pleasant time," the captain said, rising and taking a hand of each to lead them down to the breakfast-room, for the bell was ringing.

At Ion the family were gathering about the table to partake of their morning meal. Walter waited rather impatiently till the blessing had been asked, then, with an entreating look at his mother, said, "Mamma, you know what you promised?"

"Yes, my son; but be patient a little longer. I see your grandpa has something to say."

"Something that Walter will be glad to hear, I make no doubt," remarked Mr. Dinsmore, giving the child a kindly look and smile. "Capt. Raymond and I have had a little chat through the telephone this morning. He invites us all to join the Woodburn family in a sleigh-ride, he is coming for us in an omnibus sleigh; and I accepted for each and every one of you."

Zoe, Rosie and Walter uttered a simultaneous exclamation of delight, while the others looked well pleased with the arrangement.

"At what hour are we to expect the captain?" asked Mrs. Dinsmore.

"About ten."

"And where does he propose to take us?" inquired Zoe.

"I presume wherever the ladies of the party decide that they would like to go."

"Surely, papa, the gentlemen also should have a voice in that," his daughter said, sending him a bright, affectionate look from behind the coffee-urn, "you at least, in case the question is put to vote."

"Not I more than the rest of you," he returned pleasantly. "But I have no doubt we would all enjoy the ride in any direction where the sleighing is good."

"I think it will prove fine on all the roads," remarked Edward, "and I presume everybody, would enjoy driving over to Fairview, the Laurels and the Oaks to call on our nearest relatives; perhaps to the Pines and Roselands also, to see the cousins there."

"That would be nice," said Zoe, "but don't you suppose they may be improving the sleighing opportunity as well as ourselves? may be driving over here to call on us?"

"Then, when we meet, the question will be who shall turn round and go back, and who keep on," laughed Rosie.

"But to avoid such an unpleasant state of affairs we have only to ask and, answer a few questions through the telephone," said Edward.

"Certainly," said his grandfather, "and we'll attend to it the first thing on leaving the table."

Everybody was interested, and presently all were gathered about the telephone, while Edward, acting as spokesman of the party, called to first one and then another of the households nearly related to themselves.

The answers came promptly, and it was soon evident that all were intending to avail themselves of the somewhat rare opportunity offered by the snow and ice covered roads, none planning to stay at home to receive calls. They would all visit Ion if the ladies there were likely to be in.

"Tell them," said Grandma Elsie, "to take their drives this morning, come to Ion in time for dinner, and spend the rest of the day and evening here. I shall be much pleased to have them all do so."

The message went the rounds, everybody accepted the invitation, and Elsie's orders for the day to cook and housekeeper, were given accordingly.

The Woodburn party arrived in high spirits, a sleigh, containing the Fairview family, driving up at the same time. They had room for one more and wanted "mamma" to occupy it; but the captain and Violet would not resign their claim, and Evelyn and Lulu showed a strong desire to be together; so the former was transferred to the Woodburn sleigh, and Zoe and Edward took the vacant seats in that from Fairview.

The two vehicles kept near together, their occupants, the children especially, were very gay and lively. They talked of last year's holiday sports, and indulged in pleasing anticipations in regard to what might be in store for them in those now drawing near.

"We had a fine time at the Oaks, hadn't we, girls?" said Max, addressing Evelyn and Rosie.

"Yes," they replied, "but a still better one at Woodburn."

"When are you and Lu going to invite us again?" asked Rosie.

"When papa gives permission," answered Max, sending a smiling, persuasive glance in his father's direction.

"It is quite possible you may not have very long to wait for that, Max," was the kindly indulgent rejoinder from the captain.

"It is Rosie's turn this year," remarked Grandma Elsie; "Rosie's and Walter's and mine. I want all the young people of the connection – and as many of the older ones as we can make room for – to come to Ion for the Christmas holidays, or at least the greater part of them; we will settle particulars as to the time of coming and going, later on. Captain, I want you and Violet and all your children for the whole time."

"Thank you, mother; you are most kind, and I do not now see anything in the way of our acceptance of your invitation," he said; but added with a playful look at Violet, "unless my wife should object."

"If I should, mamma, you will receive my regrets in due season," laughed Violet.

The faces of the children were beaming with delight, and their young voices united in a chorus of expressions of pleasure and thanks to Grandma Elsie.

"I am glad you are all pleased with the idea," she said. "We will try to provide as great a variety of amusements as possible, and shall be glad of any hints or suggestions from old or young in regard to anything new in that line."

"We will all try to help you, mamma," Violet said, "and not be jealous or envious if your party should far outshine ours of last year."

"And we have more than a month to get ready in," remarked Rosie with satisfaction. "Oh I'm so glad mamma has decided on it in such good season!"

"Hello!" cried Max, glancing back toward an intersecting road which they had just crossed, "Here they come!"

"Who?" asked several voices, while all turned their heads to see for themselves.

"The Oaks, and the Roselands folks," answered Max, and as he spoke two large sleighs came swiftly up in the rear of their own, their occupants calling out merry greetings, and receiving a return in kind.

The wind had fallen, the cold was not intense, and they were so well protected against it by coats and robes of fur, that they scarcely felt it, and found the ride so thoroughly enjoyable that they kept it up through the whole morning, managing their return so that Ion was reached only a few minutes before the dinner hour.

Ion was a sort of headquarters for the entire connection, and everybody seemed to feel perfectly at home. Grandma Elsie was a most hospitable hostess, and it was a very cheerful, jovial party that surrounded her well-spread table that day.

After dinner, while the older people conversed together in the parlors, the younger ones wandered at will through the house.

The girls were together in a small reception-room, chatting about such matters as particularly interested them – their studies, sports, plans for the purchase or making of Christmas gifts, and what they hoped or desired to receive. "I want jewelry," said Sidney Dinsmore. "I'd rather have that than anything else. But it must be handsome: a diamond pin or ring, or ear-rings."

"Mamma says diamonds are quite unsuitable for young girls," said Rosie.

"So I prefer pearls: and I'm rather in hopes she may give me some for Christmas."

"I'd rather have diamonds anyhow," persisted Sydney. "See Maud's new ring, just sent her by a rich old aunt of ours. I'm sure it looks lovely on her finger and shows off the beauty of her hand."

"Yes, I've been admiring it," said Lulu, "and I thought I'd never seen it before."

Maud held out her hand with, evident pride and satisfaction, while the others gathered round her eager for a close inspection of the ring.

They all admired it greatly and Maud seemed gratified.

"Yes," she said, "it certainly is a beauty, and Chess says it must be worth a good deal; that centre stone is quite large, you see, and there are six others in a circle around it."

"I should think you'd feel very rich," remarked Lulu; "I'd go fairly wild with delight if I had such an one given me."

"Well then, why not give your father a hint that you'd like such a Christmas gift from him?" asked Sydney.

"I'm afraid it would cost too much," said Lulu, "and I wouldn't want papa to spend more on me than he could well afford."

"Why, he could afford it well enough!" exclaimed Maud. "Your father is very rich – worth his millions, I heard Cousin Horace say not long ago; and he knows of course."

Lulu looked much surprised. "Papa never talks of how much money he has," she said, "and I never supposed it was more than about enough to keep us comfortable; but millions means a great deal doesn't it?"

"I should say so indeed! more than your mind or mine can grasp the idea of."

Lulu's eyes sparkled. "I'm ever so glad for papa!" she said; "he's just the right person to have a great deal of money, for he will be sure to make the very best use of it."

"And for a part of it, that will be diamonds for you, won't it?" laughed

Maud.

"I hope the captain will think so by the time she's grown up," remarked Rosie, with a pleasant look at Lulu; "or sooner if they come to be thought suitable for girls of her age."

"That's nice in you Rosie," Lulu said, flushing with pleasure, "and I hope you will get your pearls this Christmas."

"I join in both wishes," said Evelyn Leland, "and hope everyone of you will receive a Christmas gift quite to her mind: but, oh girls, don't you think it would be nice to give a good time to the poor people about us?"

"What poor people?" asked Sydney.

"I mean both the whites and the blacks," explained Evelyn. "There are those Jones children that live not far from Woodburn, for instance: their mother's dead and the father gets drunk and beats and abuses them, and altogether I'm sure they are very, very forlorn."

"Oh yes," cried Lulu, "it would be just splendid to give them a good time! – nice things to eat and to wear, and toys too. I'll talk to papa about it, and he'll tell us what to give them and how to give it."

"And there are a number of other families in the neighborhood probably quite as poor and forlorn," said Lora Howard. "Oh I think it would be delightful to get them all together somewhere and surprise them with a Christmas tree loaded with nice things! Lets do it, girls. We all have some pocket money, and we can get our fathers and mothers to tell us how to use it to the best advantage, and how to manage the giving."

"I haven't a bit more pocket money than I need to buy the presents I wish to give my own particular friends," objected Sydney.

"It's nice, and right too, I think, to give tokens of love to our dear ones," Evelyn said, "but we need not make them very expensive in order to give pleasure; – often they would prefer some simple little thing that is the work of our own hands – and so we would have something left for the poor and needy, whom the Bible teaches us we should care for and relieve to the best of our ability."

"Yes, I daresay you are right," returned Sydney, "but I sha'n't make any rash promises in regard to the matter."

CHAPTER II

In the parlor the older people were conversing on somewhat similar topics: first discussing plans for the entertainment and gratification of their children and other young relatives, during the approaching holidays, then of the needs of the poor of the neighborhood, and how to supply them; after that they talked of the claims of Home and Foreign Missions; the perils threatening their country from illiteracy, anarchy, heathenism, Mormonism, Popery, Infidelity, etc., not omitting the danger from vast wealth accumulating in the hands of individuals and corporations; also they spoke of the heavy responsibility entailed by its possession.

They were patriots and Christians; anxious first of all for the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon earth, secondly for the welfare and prosperity of the dear land of their birth – the glorious old Union transmitted to us by our revolutionary fathers.

It was a personal question with each one, "How can I best use for the salvation of my country and the world, the time, talents, influence and money God has entrusted to my keeping."

They acknowledged themselves stewards of God's bounty, and as such desired to be found faithful; neglecting neither the work nearest at hand nor that in far distant lands where the people sit in great darkness and the region and shadow of death, that on them the "Sun of righteousness might arise with healing in his wings."

It had been expected that the guests would stay at Ion till bedtime, but a thaw had set in and ice and snow were fast disappearing from the roads; therefore all departed for their homes directly after an early tea.

Lulu was very quiet during the homeward drive; her thoughts were full of Maud's surprising assertion in regard to her father's wealth.

"I wonder if it is really so," she said to herself. "I'm tempted to ask papa; but he might not like it, and I wouldn't want to do anything to vex or trouble him, – my dear, dear kind father!"

An excellent opportunity for a private chat with him was afforded her shortly after their arrival at home. The little ones were fretful and Violet went to the nursery with them; Max hastened to his own room to finish a composition he was expected to hand to his father the next morning, Gracie, weary with the excitement of the day, and the long morning drive, went directly to her bed, and having seen her in it, and left her there with a loving good night, the captain and Lulu presently found themselves the only occupants of the library.

Taking possession of a large easy chair, "Come and sit on my knee and tell me how you have enjoyed your day," he said, giving her a fond fatherly smile.

"Very much indeed, papa," she answered, accepting his invitation, putting her arm round his neck and laying her cheek to his.

His arm was around her waist. He drew her closer, saying softly, "My dear, dear little daughter! I thought you were unusually quiet coming home: is anything amiss with you?"

"Oh, no, papa! I've had a lovely time all day long. How kind you were to give us all a holiday and let me go along with the rest of you."

"Good to myself as well as to you, my darlings; I could have had very little enjoyment leaving you behind."

"Papa, it's so nice to have you love me so!" she said, kissing him with ardent affection. "Oh, I do hope I'll never, *never* be very naughty again!"

"I hope not, dear child," he responded, returning her caresses. "I hope you feel ready to resume your studies to-morrow, with diligence and painstaking?"

"Yes, papa, I think I do. It's almost a week since you have heard me recite; except the Sunday lesson yesterday."

"Yes," he said gravely, "it has been something of a loss to you in one way, but I trust a decided gain in another. Well to change the subject, are you pleased with the prospect of spending the holidays at Ion?"

"Yes, papa; I think it will be lovely; almost as nice as having a party of our own, as we did last year."

"Possibly we may add that – a party here for a day or two – if Grandma Elsie does not use up all the holidays with hers," he said in a half jesting tone and with a pleasant laugh.

"O papa, do you really think we may?" she cried in delight. "Oh you are just the kindest father!" giving him a hug.

He laughed at that, returning the hug with interest.

"I suppose you and Eva and the rest were laying out plans for Christmas doings this afternoon?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes, papa, we were talking a good deal about games and tableaux, and about the things we could buy or make for gifts to our friends, and what we would like to have given us."

She paused, half hoping he would ask what she wanted from him, but he did not. He sat silently caressing her hair and cheek with his hand, and seemingly lost in thought.

At length, "Papa," she asked half hesitatingly, "are you very rich?"

"Rich?" he repeated, coming suddenly out of his reverie and looking smilingly down into her eyes, "yes; I have a sound constitution, excellent health, a delightful home, a wife and five children, each one of whom I esteem worth at least a million to me; I live in a Christian land," he went on in a graver tone, "I have the Bible with all its great and precious promises, the hope of a blessed eternity at God's right hand, and that all my dear ones are traveling heavenward with me; yes, I am a very rich man!"

"Yes, sir; but – I meant have you a great deal of money."

"Enough to provide all that is necessary for the comfort of my family, and to gratify any reasonable desire on the part of my little girl. What is it you want, my darling?"

"Papa, I'm almost ashamed to tell you," she said, blushing and hanging her head; "but if I do, and you can't afford it, won't you please say so and not feel sorry about it? because I wouldn't ever want you to spend money on me that you need for yourself or some of the others."

"I am glad you are thoughtful for others as well as yourself, daughter," he said kindly; "but don't hesitate to tell me all that is in your heart. Nothing pleases me better than to have you, and all my dear children do so."

"Thank you, my dear, dear papa. I don't mean ever to hide anything from you," she returned, giving him another hug and kiss, while her eyes sparkled and her cheek flushed with pleasure. "It's a diamond ring I'd like to have."

"A diamond ring?" he repeated in surprise. "What would my little girl do with such a thing as that?"

"Wear it, papa. Maud Dinsmore has such beautiful one, that a rich aunt sent her the other day," she went on eagerly; "there's a large diamond in the middle and little ones all round it, and it sparkles so, and looks just lovely on her hand! We all admired it ever so much, and I said I'd be wild with delight if I had such an one; then Sydney said, 'Why not give your father a hint that you'd like one for Christmas?' and I said I was afraid you couldn't afford to give me anything that would cost so much; but Maud said I needn't be, for you were worth millions of money. Can you really afford to give it to me, papa? I'd like it better than anything else if you can, but if you can't I don't want it," she concluded with a sigh, and creeping closer into his embrace.

He did not speak for a moment, but though grave and thoughtful his countenance was quite free from displeasure, – and when, at length, he spoke, his tones were very kind and affectionate.

"If I thought it would really be for my little girl's welfare and happiness in the end," he said, "I should not hesitate for a moment to gratify her in this wish of hers, but, daughter, the ornament you

covet would be extremely unsuitable for one of your years, and I fear its possession would foster a love of finery that I do not wish to cultivate in you, because it is not right, and would hinder you in the race I trust you are running for the prize of eternal life.

"The Bible tells us we can not serve both God and Mammon; can not love him and the world too.

"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' God has entrusted me with a good deal of money, but I hold it as his steward, and 'it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.'"

"I don't know what you mean, papa," she said, with look and tone of keen disappointment.

"That I must use the Lord's money to do his work, daughter; a great deal of money is needed to help on the advancement of his cause and kingdom in the hearts of individuals, and in the world at large. There are millions of poor creatures in heathen lands who have never so much as heard of Jesus and his dying love; and even in our own favored country there are thousands who are sunk in poverty, ignorance and wretchedness. Money is needed to feed and clothe them, to send them teachers and preachers, and to build churches, schools, and colleges, where they can be educated and fitted for happiness and usefulness.

"Suppose I had a thousand, or five thousand dollars, to spare after supplying my family with all that is necessary for health, comfort and happiness; could my dear eldest daughter be so selfish as to wish me to put it into a diamond ring for her at the expense of leaving some poor creature in want and misery? some poor heathen to die without the knowledge of Christ? some soul to be lost that Jesus died to save?"

"Oh no, no, papa!" she exclaimed, tears starting to her eyes, "I couldn't be so hard hearted. I couldn't bear to look at my ring if it had cost so much to other people."

"No, I am sure you could not; and I believe you would find far more enjoyment, a far sweeter pleasure, in selecting objects for me to benefit by the money the ring might cost."

"O papa, how nice, how delightful that would be if you would let me!" she cried joyously.

"I will," he said; "I have some thousands to divide among the various religious and benevolent objects, and shall give a certain sum – perhaps as much as a thousand dollars – in the name of each of my three children who are old enough to understand these things, letting each of you select the cause, or causes, to which his or her share is to go."

"Which are the causes, papa?" she asked, her eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"There are Home and Foreign Missions, the work among the freedmen, and for the destitute in our own neighborhood, beside very many others. We will read about these various objects and talk the matter over together, and finally decide how many we can help, and how much shall be given to each. Perhaps you may choose to support a little Indian girl in one of the Mission schools, or some child in heathen lands; or a missionary who will go and teach them the way to heaven."

"Oh I should love to do that!" she exclaimed, "it will be better than having a ring. Papa, how good you are to me! I am so glad God gave me such a father; one who tries always to teach me how to serve Him and to help me to be the right kind of a Christian."

"I want to help you in that, my darling," he said; "I think I could do you no greater kindness."

Just then Max came into the room, and his father called him to take a seat by his side, saying, "I am glad you have come, my son, for I was about to speak to Lulu on a subject that concerns you quite as nearly."

"Yes, sir; I'll be glad to listen," replied Max, doing as directed.

The captain went on. "The Bible tells us, 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.' If we are like Jesus in spirit, we will love others and be ready to deny ourselves to do them good; especially to save their souls; for to that end he denied himself even to the shameful and painful death of the cross.

"He says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me... Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.'"

"That is we cannot be his disciples without doing something to bring sinners to him that they may be saved; something that will cost us self-denial; it may be of our own ease, or of something we would like to do or have.

"And it must be done willingly, cheerfully, from love to the dear Master and the souls he died to save, and not as the way to earn heaven for ourselves.

"We can not merit salvation, do what we will; we must take it as God's free, undeserved gift."

There was a moment of thoughtful silence; then Max said, "Papa, I think I am willing if I knew just what to do and how to do it. Can you tell me?"

"You have some money of your own every week; you can give what you will of that to help spread abroad the glad tidings of salvation; you can pray for others, and when a favorable opportunity offers, speak a word to lead them to Christ. Ask God to show you opportunities and give you grace and wisdom to use them. Try also, so to live, and act, and speak, that all who see and know you will, take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus and learned of him."

"Papa," said Lulu, "won't you tell Max about the money you are going to give in our names?"

"No, I will let you have that pleasure," the captain answered with a kindly look and tone, and she eagerly availed herself of the permission.

Max was greatly pleased, and Violet, who joined them just in time to hear what Lulu was saying, highly approved.

"But you will understand, children," the captain said, "that this involves your gaining a great deal of information on the subject of missions, and other schemes of benevolence, and in order to help you in that, we will spend a short time each evening, when not prevented by company or some more important engagement, in reading and conversing on this topic."

"I wish I could earn some money to give," said Lulu. "I'd like to carve pretty things to sell; but who would buy them?"

"Possibly papa might become an occasional purchaser," her father said, stroking her hair and smiling kindly upon her.

"Or Mamma Vi," added her young step-mother.

"And I have another offer to make you both," said the captain; "for every day that I find you obedient, pleasant-tempered and industrious I will give each of you twenty-five cents for benevolent purposes."

"Thank you, papa," they both said, their eyes sparkling with pleasure;

Max adding, "That will be a dollar and seventy-five cents a week."

"Yes; and for every week that either one of you earns the quarter every day, I will add another to bring it up to two dollars."

"O papa, how nice!" exclaimed Lulu. "I mean to try very hard, so that I may have enough to support a little Indian girl. And is Gracie to have the same?"

"Certainly; and I shall not be greatly surprised if Gracie's missionary box fills faster than either of the others."

"I am almost sure it will," said Lulu, sobering down a good deal; "and

Max's will be next. But I do mean to try ever so hard to be good."

"I am quite sure you do, dear child," her father responded in tender tones. "I know my little girl wants to improve, and I shall do all I can to help her."

"Papa, is that quarter a day for good conduct, to be in addition to our usual pocket money?" asked Max.

"Certainly, my son; your pocket money is your own, to use for your pleasure or profit, except what you feel that you ought, or desire to give of it; but the quarter is expressly, and only for benevolent purposes."

"When may we begin to earn it, papa?"

"To-morrow."

"I'm glad of that," said Lulu with satisfaction, "because I want to earn a good deal before Christmas."

Then she told of Evelyn's suggestions in regard to gifts for the poor in their immediate neighborhood.

"A very good idea," her father said, "and I think it may be carried out in a way to yield enjoyment to both givers and receivers."

"I hope it will be cold enough at Christmas time to make ice and snow for sleighing and sledding," Max remarked; "for we boys have planned to have a good deal of fun for ourselves and the girls too, if it is."

"You mean if there is sleighing and sledding," his father said with an amused look. "It might be cold enough, yet the needed snow or ice be lacking."

"Why, yes, sir, to be sure, so it might!" Max returned, laughing good humoredly.

"What kind of fun is it you boys have planned for us girls?" asked Lulu.

"Never you mind," said Max; "you'll see when the time comes; the surprise will be half of it you know."

"My dear, you seem to me a very wise and kind father," Violet remarked to her husband when they found themselves alone together, after Max and Lulu had gone to their beds. "I very highly approve of the plans you have just proposed for them. Though, of course the approval of a silly young thing, such as I, must be a matter of small consequence," she added, with a merry, laughing look up into his face.

"Young, but not silly," he returned, with a very lover-like look and smile. "I consider my wife's judgment worth a great deal, and am highly gratified with her approval. I am extremely desirous," he went on more gravely, "to train my darlings to systematic benevolence, a willingness to deny themselves for the cause of Christ, and to take an interest in every branch of the work of the church."

CHAPTER III

Lulu's first thought on awaking the next morning, was of the talk of the previous evening, with her father. He had said she might have the pleasure of telling Gracie the good news in regard to the money to be earned by good conduct, and that which was to be given by him in the name of each of his older children; also the privilege he would accord them of selecting the particular cause, or causes, to which the money should go.

Eager to avail herself of the permission, and see Gracie's delight, she sprang from her bed, ran to the door of communication between their sleeping rooms, which generally stood open – always at night – and peeped cautiously in.

Gracie's head was still on her pillow, but at that instant she stirred, opened her eyes, and called out in a pleased tone, "O Lu, so you are up first!" speaking softly though, for fear of disturbing their father and Violet, in the room beyond, the door there being open also.

Lulu hurried to it and closed it gently, then turning toward her sister, "Yes," she said, "but it's early, and you needn't get up just yet. I'm coming to creep in with you for a few minutes while I tell you something that I'm sure will please you."

She crept into Grace's bed as she spoke, and they lay for a while clasped in each other's arms, Lulu talking very fast, Grace listening and now and then putting in a word or two. She was quite as much pleased with what Lulu had to tell, as the latter had anticipated.

"Oh won't it be just lovely to have so much money to do good with!" she exclaimed when all had been told. "Haven't we got the very best and dearest father in the world? I don't believe, Lu, there's another one half so dear and kind and nice. We ought to be ever such good children!"

"Yes, but I'm not," sighed Lulu. "O Gracie, I'd give anything to be as good as you are!"

"Now don't talk so, Lu; you make me feel like a hypocrite; because I'm not good," said Grace.

"You are; at any rate you're a great deal better than I am," asserted Lulu with warmth. "You never disobey papa, or get into a passion; and I don't think you love finery as I do. Gracie, I want that ring yet; oh I should like to have it ever so much! and I oughtn't to want it; it's very selfish, because to buy it would use up money that ought to go to send missionaries to the heathen, or do good to some poor miserable creature; and it's wrong for me to want it, because papa says it wouldn't be good for me; and if I were as good as I ought to be I'd never want anything he doesn't think best for me to have. But, oh dear, how can I help it when I'm so fond of pretty things!"

"Lu," said Grace, softly, "I do believe that if you ask the Lord Jesus to help you to quit wanting it, he will. But if you didn't care for it, it wouldn't be denying yourself to do without it for the sake of the heathen."

"Maybe so; but I don't believe papa would let me have it even if I wouldn't consent to give it up, and begged him ever so hard for it."

"No, I s'pose not, for he loves us too well to give us anything that he thinks will make it harder for us to love and serve God and go to heaven when we die."

"Yes, and of course that's the best way for people to love their children. It's time for me to get up now, but you'd better lie still a little longer."

With that Lulu slipped from the bed, ran back to her room, and kneeling down there, gave thanks for the sleep of the past night, for health and strength, a good home, her dear, kind father to take care of, and provide for her, and love her, and all her many, many comforts and blessings; and confessing her sins, she asked to be forgiven for Jesus' sake, and to have strength given her to do all her duty that day, – to be patient, obedient, industrious, kind and helpful to others and willing to deny herself, especially in the matter of the ring she had been wishing for so ardently.

When the captain came into the apartments of his little daughters for a few minutes chat before breakfast, as was his custom, he found them both neatly dressed and looking bright and happy.

"How are you, my darlings?" he asked, kissing them in turn, then seating himself and drawing them into his arms.

"I think we're both very well, papa," answered Lulu.

"Yes, indeed!" said Grace, "and I'm ever so glad of what Lu's been telling me 'bout the money you are going to give us if we're good, and the choosing 'bout where the other shall go that you're going to give to help send missionaries to the heathen. Thank you for both, dear papa; but don't you think we ought to be good without being paid for it?"

"Yes, I certainly do, my dear little girl; but at the same time I want my children to have the luxury of being able to give something which they have, in some sense, earned for that purpose. I want you to learn in your own experience the truth of the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

"Now while you are so young, not capable of earning much in any other way, your proper business the task of gaining knowledge and skill to fit you for future usefulness, I see no more fitting way than this for you to be furnished with money for religious and benevolent purposes."

"Papa," asked Lulu, "do you think it is never right for anybody to have diamonds or handsome jewelry of any kind?"

"I do not think it my business to judge in such matters for everybody," he answered, caressing her and smiling down tenderly into her eyes; "but I must judge for myself – applying the rules the Bible gives me – and to a great extent for my children also while they are so young."

"Not for Mamma Vi?" Lulu asked, with some little hesitation.

"No; she is my wife, not my child, and old enough to judge for herself."

"She has a great deal of beautiful jewelry," remarked Lulu with an involuntary sigh, "and Grandma Elsie has still more. Rosie asked her once to show it to us children, and she did. Oh she has just the loveliest rings and whole sets of jewelry – pins and ear-rings to match – and chains and bracelets! I'm sure they must be worth a great deal of money; Rosie said they were, and I'm sure Grandma Elsie is a real true Christian – a very, very good one and that Mamma Vi is too."

"And I agree with you in that," was the emphatic reply. "But my daughter and I have nothing to do with deciding their duty for them in regard to this or other things. God does not require that of us; indeed forbids it; 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' Jesus said.

"But I see plainly that my duty is as I explained it to you last evening, and I thought then you were convinced that it would be selfish and wrong for you and me to spend a large sum for useless ornament that might otherwise be used for the good of our fellow creatures, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom."

"Yes, papa, I was, and I'm trying, and asking God to help me, not to want the ring I asked you for; but I'm afraid it'll take me quite a while to quite stop wishing for it," she sighed.

"You will conquer at length, if you keep on trying and asking for help," he said, giving her a tender kiss.

"A good plan will be to fill your thoughts with other things," he went on; "your lessons while in the school-room, after that you may find it pleasant to begin planning for Christmas gifts to be made or bought for those you love, and others whom you would like to help. I shall give each of you – including Max – as much extra spending money as I did last year."

"Beside all that for benevolence, papa?" they asked in surprise and delight.

"Yes; what I provide you with for benevolence, is something aside from your spending money, which you are at liberty to do with as you please, within certain bounds," he said rising and taking a hand of each as the breakfast bell sounded out its summons to the morning meal.

Misconduct and poor recitations were alike very rare in the school-room at Woodburn; neither found a place there to-day, so that the captain had only commendations to bestow, and they were heartily and gladly given.

The ice and snow had entirely disappeared, and the roads were muddy; too muddy, it was thought, to make travel over them particularly agreeable; but the children obtained sufficient exercise in romping over the wide porches and trotting round the grounds on their ponies.

But in spite of the bad condition of the roads, the Ion carriage drove over early in the afternoon, and Grandma Elsie, Mrs. Elsie Leland – her namesake daughter – Rosie and Evelyn alighted from it. Everybody was delighted to see them, and to hear that they would stay to tea.

"O girls," said Lulu, "come up to my room and take off your things. I've something to tell you," and she looked so gay and happy that they felt quite sure it was something that pleased her greatly.

"I think I can guess what it is," laughed Rosie; "your father has promised you the diamond ring you want so badly."

"No, it isn't that; you may have another guess; but I don't believe you could hit the right thing if you should guess fifty or a hundred times."

"Then I sha'n't try. I give it up. Don't you, Eva?"

"Yes, please tell us, Lu," said Evelyn.

Then Lulu, talking fast and eagerly, repeated to them what she had told to Grace, in bed that morning.

"Oh how nice!" Evelyn exclaimed. "How I should like to be in your place,

Lu!"

"I think it's nice, too," Rosie said, "and I'd like mamma or grandpa to do the same by me. But I'd want my pearls too," she added, laughing. "Mamma's rich enough to give me them, and do all she need do for missions and the poor beside."

"But so very, very much is needed," remarked Evelyn.

"I've read in some of the religious papers, that if every church member would give but a small sum yearly, there would be enough," said Rosie; "and mamma gives hundreds and thousands of dollars; and grandpa gives a great deal too. So I don't see that I ought to do without the set of pearls I've set my heart on. It isn't mamma's place to do other people's duty for them – in the way of giving, any more than in other things."

Grandma Elsie and her older daughters were in Violet's boudoir.

"I had letters this morning, from your brothers Harold and Herbert, Vi, and have brought them with me to read to you," the mother said, taking the missives from her pocket.

"Thank you, mamma; I am always glad to hear what they write; their letters are never dull or uninteresting," Violet replied, her sister Elsie adding, "They are always worth hearing, Lester and I think. What dear boys they are!"

"And quite as highly appreciated by my husband as by yours, Elsie,"

Violet said with a bright, happy look.

"They are a great blessing and comfort to their mother," Grandma Elsie remarked, "as indeed all my children are – their letters always a source of pleasure, but these even more so than most; for they show that my college boys are greatly stirred up on the subject of missions at home and abroad; full of renewed zeal for the advancement of the Master's cause and kingdom."

She then read the letters which gave abundant evidence of the correctness of her estimate of the state of her sons' minds.

They were working as teachers in a mission Sunday school, as Bible readers and tract distributors among the poor and degraded of the city where they were sojourning; doing good to bodies as well as souls – their mother supplying them with means for that purpose in addition to what she allowed them for pocket-money; – also exerting an influence for good among their fellow students.

They told of interesting meetings held for prayer and conference upon the things concerning the kingdom; of renewed and higher consecration on the part of many who were already numbered among the Master's followers, and the conversion of others who had hitherto cared for none of these things.

The reading of the letters was followed by an earnest talk between the mother and her daughters, in which Violet told of her husband's plans for giving through his children, in addition to what he would give in other ways.

"What excellent ideas?" Grandma Elsie exclaimed, her eyes shining with pleasure. "I shall adopt both with my younger two children, one with all of you."

"Which is that last, mamma?" asked Violet sportively.

"The letting each of you select an object for a certain sum which I shall give."

"Mamma, that is very nice and kind," remarked her daughter Elsie, "but we should give of our own means. Do you not think so?"

"You may do that in addition," her mother said. "I have seven children on earth – eight counting Zoe, and one in heaven. I shall give a thousand dollars in the name of each."

"Mamma, I for one fully appreciate your kindness, but think you would make a wiser choice of objects than we," said Violet, looking lovingly into her mother's eyes.

"I want you to have the pleasure," her mother answered, "and I am reserving much the larger part of what I have to give, for objects of my own selection; for it has pleased the Lord to trust me with the stewardship of a good deal of the gold and silver which are his."

At that moment the little girls entered the room, and Rosie, hurrying up to her mother, asked, "Mamma, have you heard, has Vi told you what the captain intends doing? how he is going to reward his children for good behavior?"

"Yes; and I shall do the same by you and Walter."

"That's a dear, good mamma!" exclaimed Rosie with satisfaction. "I thought you would."

"And I intend to follow the captain's lead in another matter," Grandma Elsie went on, smiling pleasantly upon her young daughter; "That is in allowing each of my sons and daughters to select some good object for me to give to."

"That's nice too," commented Rosie: "I like to be trusted in such things – as well as others," she added laughing, "and I hope you'll trust me with quite a sum of money to give or spend just as I please!"

"Ah, my darling, you must not forget that your mother is only a steward," was the sweet toned response, given between a smile and a sigh; for Grandma Elsie was not free from anxiety about this youngest daughter, who had some serious faults, and had not yet entered the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Evelyn, dear, you too, as my pupil and a sort of adopted daughter, must share the reward of good behavior," she said, with a tenderly affectionate look at the fatherless niece of her son-in-law.

Evelyn flushed with pleasure; but more because of the loving look than the promise of reward. "Dear Grandma Elsie, how very kind and good you always are to me!" she exclaimed feelingly, her eyes filling with tears of love and gratitude.

"Dear child, whatever I have done for you has always been both a duty and a pleasure," Mrs. Travilla returned, taking the hand of the little girl, who was standing by her side, and pressing; it affectionately in her own.

"Well, Eva," said Rosie, lightly, "you can calculate to a cent what you'll have for benevolence, for you're sure to earn the quarter every day of your life."

"Not quite, Rosie," Evelyn answered in her gentle, refined tones, "I am liable to fall as well as others, and may astonish both you and myself some day by behaving very ill indeed."

"I certainly should be astonished, Eva," laughed her Aunt Elsie. "I am quite sure it would be only under great provocation that you would be guilty of very bad behavior; and equally certain that you will never find that at Ion."

"No," Evelyn said, "I have never received anything but the greatest kindness there."

"And you are so sweet-tempered that you would never fly into a passion if you were treated ever so badly," remarked Lulu, with an admiring, appreciative look at her friend, accompanied by a regretful sigh over her own infirmity of temper.

"Perhaps my faults lie in another direction; and how much credit do people deserve for refraining from doing what they feel no temptation to do?" said Evelyn, with an arch look and smile directed toward Lulu.

"And those that tease quick tempered people, and make them angry, deserve at least half the blame," Rosie said softly in Lulu's ear, putting an arm affectionately about her as she spoke. "I don't mean to do so ever again, Lu, dear."

"I'm sure you don't, Rosie," returned Lulu, in the same low key, her eyes shining, "and it's ever so good in you to take part of the blame of my badness."

The visitors went away shortly after tea, Violet carried her babies off to bed, and the older three of the Woodburn children were left alone with their father.

They clustered about him, Grace on his knee, Lulu on one side, Max on the other, while their tongues ran fast on whatever subject happened to be uppermost in their thoughts, the captain encouraging them to talk freely; for he was most desirous to have their entire confidence in order that he might be the better able to correct wrong ideas and impressions, inculcate right views and motives, and lead them to tread the paths of rectitude, living noble, unselfish lives, serving God and doing good to their fellow creatures.

Sensible questions were sure to be patiently answered, requests carefully considered, and granted if reasonable and within his power; and instruction was given in a way to make it interesting and agreeable; reproof, if called for, administered in a kind, fatherly manner that robbed it of its sting.

They talked of their sports, their pets, the books they were reading, the coming holidays, the enjoyment they were looking forward to at that time, and their plans for helping to make it a happy time to others.

Evidently they were troubled with no doubt of their father's fond affection, or of the fact that he was their best earthly friend and wisest counsellor.

"There are so many people I want to give to," said Lulu; "it will take ever so much thinking to know how to manage it."

"Yes; because of course we want to give things they'd like to have, and that we'll have money enough to buy, or time to make," said Grace.

"Perhaps I can help you with your plans," said their father. "I think it would be well to make out a list of those to whom you wish to give, and then decide what amount to devote to each, and what sort of thing would be likely to prove acceptable, yet not cost more than you have set apart for its purchase."

"Oh what a nice plan, papa!" exclaimed Lulu. "We'll each make a list, sha'n't we?"

"Yes; if you choose. Max, my son, you may get out paper and pencils for us, and we will set to work at once; no time like the present, is a good motto in most cases."

Max hastened to obey and the lists were made out amid a good deal of pleasant chat, now grave, now gay.

"We don't have to put down all the names, papa, do we?" Grace asked with an arch look and smile up into his face.

"No; we will except present company," he replied, stroking her hair caressingly, and returning her smile with one full of tender fatherly affection.

The names were all written down first, then came the task of deciding upon the gifts.

"We will take your lists in turn, beginning with Max's and ending with Gracie's," the captain said.

That part of the work required no little consultation between the three children; papa's advice was asked in every instance, and almost always decided the question; but, glancing over the lists when completed, "I think, my dears, you have laid out too much work for yourselves," he said.

"But I thought you always liked us to be industrious, papa," said Lulu.

"Yes, daughter, but not overworked; I can not have that; nor can I allow you to neglect your studies, omit needed exercise, or go without sufficient sleep to keep you in health."

"Papa, you always make taking good care of us the first thing," she said gratefully, nestling closer to him.

"Don't you know that's what fathers are for?" he said, smiling down on her. "My children were given me to be taken care of, provided for, loved and trained up aright. A precious charge!" he added, looking from one to another with glistening eyes.

"Yes, sir, I know," she said, laying her head on his shoulder and slipping a hand into his, "and oh but I'm glad and thankful that God gave me to you instead of to somebody else!"

"And Gracie and I are just as glad to belong to papa as you are," said Max, Grace adding, "Yes, indeed!" as she held up her face for a kiss, which her father gave very heartily.

"But, papa, what are we to do about the presents if we mustn't take time to make them?" asked Lulu.

"Make fewer and buy more."

"But maybe the money won't hold out."

"You will have to make it hold out by choosing less expensive articles, or giving fewer gifts."

"We'll have to try hard to earn the quarter for good behavior every day,

Lu," said Max.

"Yes, I mean to; but that won't help with Christmas gifts; it's only for benevolence, you know."

"But what you give to the poor, simply because they are poor and needy, may be considered benevolence, I think," said their father.

"Oh may it?" she exclaimed. "I'm glad of that! Papa, I – haven't liked Dick very much since he chopped up the cradle I'd carved for Gracie's dolls, but I believe I want to give him a Christmas present; it will help me to forgive him and like him better. But I don't know what would please him best."

"Something to make a noise with," suggested Max; "a drum or trumpet for instance."

"He'd make too much racket," she objected.

"How would a hatchet do?" asked Max, with waggish look and smile.

"Not at all; he isn't fit to be trusted with one," returned Lulu, promptly. "Papa, what do you think would be a suitable present for him?"

"A book with bright pictures and short stories told very simply in words of one or two syllables. Dick is going to school and learning to read, and I think such a gift would be both enjoyable and useful to him."

"Yes; that'll be just the right thing!" exclaimed Lulu. "Papa, you always do know best about everything."

"I hope you'll stick to that idea, Lu," laughed Max. "You seem to have only just found it out; but Grace and I have known it this long while; haven't we, Gracie?"

"Yes, indeed!" returned the little sister.

"And so have I," said Lulu, hanging her head and blushing, "only sometimes I've forgotten it for a while. But I hope I won't any more, dear papa," she added softly, with a penitent, beseeching look up into his face.

"I hope not, my darling," he responded in tender tones, caressing her hair and cheek with his hand, "and the past shall not be laid up against you."

"Papa, will you take us to the city, as you did last year, and let us choose, ourselves, the things we are going to give?" asked Max.

"I intend to do so," his father said. "Judging from the length of your lists, I think we will have to take several trips to accomplish it all. So we will make a beginning before long, when the weather has become settled; perhaps the first pleasant day of next week, if you have all been good and industrious about your lessons."

"Have we earned our quarters to-day, papa?" asked Grace.

"I think you are in a fair way to do so," he answered smiling, "but you still have a chance to lose them between this and your bedtime."

"It's just before we get into bed you'll give them to us, papa?" Lulu said inquiringly.

"I shall tell you at that time whether you have earned them, but I may sometimes only set the amount down to your credit and pay you the money in a lump at the end of the week."

"Yes, sir; we'll like that way just as well," they returned in chorus.

Violet had come in and taken possession of an easy chair on the farther side of the glowing grate.

Looking smilingly at the little group opposite, "I have a thought," she said lightly; "who can guess it?"

"It's something nice about papa; how handsome he is, and how good and kind," ventured Lulu.

"A very close guess, Lu," laughed Violet; "for my thought was that the Woodburn children have as good and kind a father as could be found in all the length and breadth of the land."

"We know it, Mamma Vi; we all think so," cried the children.

But the captain shook his head, saying, "Ah, my dear, flattery is not good for me. If you continue to dose me with it, who knows but I shall become as conceited and vain as a peacock?"

"Not a bit of danger of that!" she returned gaily. "But I do not consider the truth flattery."

"Suppose we change the subject," he said with a good-humored smile. "We have been making out lists of Christmas gifts and would like to have your opinion and advice in regard to some of them."

"You shall have them for what they are worth," she returned, taking the slips of paper Max handed her, and glancing over them.

CHAPTER IV

The parlor at Ion, full of light and warmth, looked very pleasant and inviting this evening. The whole family – not so large now as it had been before Capt. Raymond took his wife and children to a home of their own – were gathered there; – Mr. Dinsmore and his wife – generally called Grandma Rose by the children – Grandma Elsie, her son Edward and his wife, Zoe, and the two younger children; – Rosie and Walter.

The ladies and Rosie were all knitting or crocheting. Mr. Dinsmore and Edward were playing chess, and Walter was deep in a story book.

"Zoe," said Rosie, breaking a pause in the conversation, "do you know, has mamma told you, about her new plans for benevolence? how she is going to let us all help her in distributing her funds?"

"Us?" echoed Zoe inquiringly.

"Yes; all her children; and that includes you of course."

"Most assuredly it does," said Grandma Elsie, smiling tenderly upon her young daughter-in-law.

Zoe's eyes sparkled. "Thank you, mamma," she said with feeling. "I should be very sorry to be left out of the number; I am very proud of belonging there."

"But what about the new plans, Rosie? if mamma is willing you should tell me now what they are."

"Quite willing," responded mamma, and Rosie went on.

"You know mamma always gives thousands of dollars every year to home and foreign missions, and other good causes, and she says that this time she will let each of us choose a cause for her to give a thousand to."

"I like that!" exclaimed Zoe. "Many thanks, mamma, for my share of the privilege. I shall choose to have my thousand go to help the mission schools in Utah. I feel so sorry for those poor Mormon women. The idea of having to share your husband with another woman, or maybe half a dozen or more! It's simply awful!"

"Yes; and that is only a small part of the wickedness Mormonism is responsible for," remarked Grandma Rose. "Think of the tyranny of their priesthood; interfering with the liberty of the people in every possible way – claiming the right to dictate as to what they shall read, where they shall send their children to school, with whom they shall trade, where they shall live, or ordering them to break up their homes, make a forced sale of their property, and move into another state or territory at their own cost, or go on a mission."

"Their wicked doctrine and practice of what they call blood atonement, too," sighed Grandma Elsie.

"And the bitter hatred they inculcate toward the people and government of these United States," added Zoe. "Oh I am sure both love of country and desire for the advancement of Christ's cause and kingdom, should lead us to do all we can to rescue Utah from Mormonism. Do you not think so, mamma?"

"I entirely agree with you, and am well satisfied with your choice,"

Grandma Elsie replied.

"Perhaps I shall choose for mine to go there too," said Rosie. "But I believe I'll take a little more time to consider the claims of other causes."

Walter closed his book and came to his mother's side. "Am I to have a share in it, mamma?" he asked.

"In selecting an object for me to give to? Yes, my son."

"A thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Oh that's good! I think I'll adopt an Indian boy, clothe and educate him."

"Adopt?" laughed Rosie; "a boy of ten talking about adopting somebody else!"

"Not to be a father to him, Rosie – except in the way of providing for him as fathers do for their children. Mamma knows what I mean."

"Yes, my boy, I do; and highly approve. As a nation we have robbed the poor Indians, and owe them a debt that I fear will never be paid."

"I mean to do my share toward paying it if I live to be a man," Walter said, "and I'd like to begin now."

"I am very glad to hear it, my son," responded his mother.

"Would you prefer to have all your thousands go to pay that debt, mamma?" asked Rosie.

"No, child, not all; as I have said, I highly approve of Zoe's choice; and I would send the gospel tidings into the dark places of the earth, to the millions who have never heard the name of Jesus."

"And there is another race to whom we owe reparation," remarked Mr. Dinsmore, leaning back in his chair, and regarding the chess-board with a half rueful look. "There, Ned, my boy, I think you wouldn't have come off victor if my attention had not been called from the game by the talk of the ladies."

"Never mind, Grandpa; we'll take all the blame," laughed Rosie, jumping up to run and put her arms round his neck and give him a kiss.

He returned it, drew her to his knee, and went on with his remarks.

"You all know, of course, that I refer to the negroes, who were forcibly torn from their own land and enslaved in this. We must educate and evangelize them: as a debt we owe them, and also for the salvation of our country, whose liberties will be greatly imperilled by their presence and possession of the elective franchise, if they are left to ignorance and vice."

"Grandpa, what do you mean by the elective franchise?" asked Walter going to the side of the old gentleman's chair.

"The right to vote at elections, my son. You can see, can't you, what harm might come from it."

"Yes, sir; they might help to put bad men into office; some of themselves maybe; and bad men would be likely to make bad laws, and favor rogues. Oh yes, sir, I understand it!"

"Then perhaps you may want to help provide for the instruction of the colored race as well as of the Indians?"

"Yes, sir, I would like to. I hope the thousand dollars may be enough to help the work for both."

"I think it will; that your mother will be satisfied to have you divide it into two or more portions, that several good objects may receive some aid from it."

"Will you, mamma?" asked Walter, turning to her.

"Yes, I think it would perhaps be the wisest way."

"And besides," said Rosie, "mamma is going to give us young ones a chance to earn money for benevolence by paying us for good behavior. I know we ought to be good without other reward than that of a good conscience, but I'm quite delighted with the plan for all that."

"I too," said Walter, looking greatly pleased.

"Thank you, mamma dear. How much is it you're going to give us?"

"Twenty-five cents for every day on which I have no occasion to find fault with either your conduct or recitations."

"A new idea, daughter, isn't it?" queried Mr. Dinsmore.

"Yes, sir; and not original. I learned at Woodburn to-day, that the captain was going to try the plan with his children. I trust it meets your approval? I might better have consulted with you before announcing my intention to adopt it."

"That was not at all necessary," he returned pleasantly. "But I quite approve, and trust, you will find it work to your entire satisfaction."

"Talking of helping the blacks, and thinking of the advice so often given, 'Do the work nearest at hand,' it strikes me it would be well for us to begin with those in our own house and on the plantation," remarked Edward.

"I think they have never been neglected, Edward," said his grandfather; "a school-house was provided for them years ago, your mother pays a teacher to instruct them, visits the school frequently, often gives religious instruction herself to the pupils there, and to their parents in visiting them in their cabins; sees that they are taken care of in sickness too, and that they do not suffer for the necessities of life at any time."

"Yes, sir, that is all true," returned Edward, "but I was only thinking of giving them some extra care, instruction and gifts during the approaching holidays; says a Christmas tree loaded with, not the substantials of life only, but some of the things that will give pleasure merely – finery for the women and girls, toys for the children and so forth."

"Meaning tobacco for the old folks and sweets for all, I suppose?" added Zoe with sportive look and tone.

"Yes, my dear, that's about it," he said, smiling affectionately upon her.

"O mamma, let us do it!" cried Rosie with enthusiasm; "let's have a fine big tree in their school-room, and have them come there and get their gifts before we have ours here. We should get Vi and the captain to join us in it as the colored children from Woodburn attend school there too."

"I am well pleased with the idea," replied her mother, "and have little doubt that the captain and Vi will be also. But let us have your opinion, my dear father," she added, turning upon him a look of mingled love and reverence.

"It coincides with yours, daughter," Mr. Dinsmore answered. "And I move that Ned' and Zoe be appointed a committee to find out the needs of the proposed recipients of our bounty; others being permitted to assist if they like."

The motion was carried by acclamation, merry jesting and laughter followed, and in the midst of it all the door was thrown open and a visitor announced.

"Mr. Lilburn, ladies and gentlemen."

Grandma Elsie hastily laid aside her crocheting and hurried forward with both hands extended. "Cousin Ronald! what a joyful surprise! Welcome, welcome to Ion!"

"Thanks, a thousand thanks, my fair kinswoman, my bonny leddy, my sweet Cousin Elsie," returned the old gentleman, taking the offered hands in his and imprinting a kiss upon the still round and blooming cheek. "I have ventured to come without previous announcement o' my intention, or query about the inconvenience I might cause in your household arrangements, or –"

"No fear of that, sir," Mr. Dinsmore interrupted, offering his hand in return. "I know that you are, and always will be, a most welcome guest in my daughter's house. You have given us a very pleasant surprise, and the fault will not be ours if we do not keep you all winter."

The others, from Mrs. Dinsmore down to Walter, followed suit with greetings no less joyous and cordial, for the old gentleman was a great favorite at Ion, and with the whole connection.

He was presently installed in the easiest chair, in the warmest corner, and hospitably urged to take some refreshment.

But he declined, saying he had had his supper in the village, before driving over, and wanted nothing more till morning.

Then he went on to account for his sudden appearance. He had been sojourning some hundreds of miles farther north, had not been well, and his physician advising an immediate change to a more southerly climate, he had set out at once for Ion, without waiting to let them know of his intentions; feeling sure of just such a welcome as he had received.

"And a month's warning could not have made you more welcome than you are, cousin," said his hostess.

The conversation broken in upon by Mr. Lilburn's arrival, was not renewed that evening, but the subject was introduced again the next morning at the breakfast table, and some questions in regard to it were decided. All could not be, however, without consultation with the captain and Violet, and with Lester and Elsie Leland.

Both families were speedily informed, through the telephone, of the arrival of Mr. Lilburn, and that afternoon saw them all gathered at Ion again to do him honor, and to complete their arrangements for the holiday festivities.

During the intervening weeks there was a great deal of traveling back and forth between the three houses, and to and from the city; for their plans involved a good deal of shopping on the part of both the older people and the children.

The latter were so full of pleasureable excitement that at times they found no little difficulty in giving proper attention to their studies. Such was especially the case with Rosie and Lulu, but both Grandma Elsie and Capt. Raymond were quite firm, though in a kind and gentle way, in requiring tasks to be well learned before permission was given to lay them aside for more congenial employment.

Rosie besought her mother very urgently for permission to sit up for an hour beyond her usual bedtime, in order to make greater progress with her fancy work for Christmas, but it was not granted.

"No, my dear little daughter," Elsie said, "you need your usual amount of sleep to keep you in health, and I can not have you deprived of it."

"But, mamma," returned Rosie, a little impatiently, "I'm sure it couldn't do me any great amount of damage to try it a few times, and I really think you might allow me to do so."

"My daughter must try to believe that her mother knows best," was the grave, though gently spoken rejoinder.

"I think it is a little hard, mamma," pouted Rosie; "I'm almost grown up and it's so pleasant in the parlor where you are all talking together – especially now that Cousin Ronald is here – that it does seem too bad to have to run away from it all an hour before you older folks separate for the night. I'd feel it hard even if I wasn't wanting more time for my fancy work for Christmas."

"A little girl with so foolish and unkind a mother as yours is certainly much to be pitied," Mrs. Travilla remarked in reply.

"Mamma, I did not mean that; I could never think or speak of you in that way," returned Rosie, blushing vividly and hanging her head.

"If you had overheard Lulu addressing the remarks to her father that you have just made to me, would you have taken them as evidence of her confidence in his wisdom and love for her?" asked her mother; and Rosie was obliged to acknowledge that she would not.

"Please forgive me, mamma dear," she said penitently. "I'll not talk so again. I haven't earned my quarter for good behavior to-day. I'm quite aware of that."

"No, my child, I am sorry to have to say you have not," sighed her mother.

It was one afternoon in the second week after Mr. Lilburn's arrival that this conversation between Rosie and her mother was held.

At the same hour Max and Lulu were in their work-room at home, busily carving. Since their dismissal from that morning's tasks, they had spent every moment of time at that work, except what had necessarily been given to the eating of their dinner.

Presently their father came in.

"You are very industrious, my darlings," he said in a pleasant tone, "but how much exercise have you taken in the open air to-day?"

"Not any yet, papa," answered Max.

"Then it must be attended to at once by both of you."

"O papa, let me keep on at this just a little longer," pleaded Lulu.

"No, daughter, not another minute; these winter days are short; the sun will soon set, and outdoor exercise will not do you half so much good after sundown as before. Put on your hats and coats and we will have a brisk walk together. The roads are quite dry now and I think we will find it enjoyable."

The cloud that had begun to gather on Lulu's brow at the refusal of her request, vanished with the words of invitation to walk with papa, for to do so, was one of her dear delights.

Both she and Max obeyed the order with cheerful alacrity, and presently the three sallied forth together to return in time for tea, in good spirits and with fine appetites for their meal; the children rosy and merry.

Violet was teaching Lulu to crochet, and the little girl had become much interested in her work. When the hour for bedtime came she did not want to give it up, and like Rosie begged for permission to stay up for another hour.

"No, dear child," her father said, "it is quite important that little ones like you should keep to regular hours, early hours too, for going to rest."

"Then may I get up sooner in the mornings while I'm so busy?" she asked coaxingly.

"If you find yourself unable to sleep; not otherwise. My little girl's health is of far more importance than the making of the most beautiful Christmas gifts," he added with a tender caress.

"And I sha'n't forget this time that papa knows best," she said in a cheery tone, giving him a hug.

He returned it. "I think to-morrow is likely to be a pleasant day," he said, "and if so I hope to take my wife and children to the city for some more of the shopping you all seem to find so necessary and delightful just now. Your Aunt Elsie and Evelyn are going too, so that you can probably have your friend's help in selecting the articles you wish to buy."

"Oh how delightful!" she exclaimed. "I ought to be a good girl with such a kind father, always planning something to give me pleasure."

"You enjoy such expeditions, don't you, Lu?" queried Violet.

"Yes, indeed, Mamma Vi, and I hope papa will take me several times. I want to select my gift for Rosie to-morrow, with Eva to help me; and I'd like Rosie to go with me another time to help me choose one for Evelyn."

"I think I shall be able to gratify you in that; and to give you more time for Christmas work, I will release you from the task of taking care of your own rooms, till after the holidays, and have them attended to by one of the servants," said the captain. "But now bid good night and go to your bed."

"Oh thank you, dear papa," she cried joyously, and obeyed at once without a murmur.

The weather next day was favorable, and the shopping a decided success. The ladies and little girls returned somewhat weary with their exertions, but in fine spirits, Lulu feeling particularly happy over a present for Rosie, which every one thought was sure to be acceptable.

A few days later her father took her and Rosie together, Evelyn being left out of the party in order that her present might be selected without her knowledge.

Indeed in the afternoon of every pleasant day, from that to the one before Christmas, the Woodburn carriage might have been seen driving to and from the city; and on almost every occasion Lulu was one of its occupants.

But on the twenty third she preferred to stay behind – so much that she wanted a share in was going on at, or near home; first the trimmings with evergreens of several rooms in the mansion, then of the school-house for the poor whites of the neighborhood, which Capt. Raymond had caused to be built on a corner of his estate – paying a teacher that the children might be instructed without cost to their parents.

A fine large Christmas tree was set up in it, another in the school-house for the blacks at Ion.

The colored people employed on the Fairview estate attended there also, and were to have a share in the entertainment provided for those of Woodburn and Ion; so the children of the three families united in the work of ornamenting first one building, then the other, finding it great sport, and

flattering themselves that they were of great assistance, though the older people who were overseeing matters, and the servants acting under their direction, were perhaps of a different opinion. Yet the sight of the enjoyment of the little folks more than atoned for the slight inconvenience of having them about.

Christmas came on Wednesday and the holidays had begun for them all the Friday before. Lessons would not be taken up again till after New Year's day.

It had been decided at Woodburn that they would not go to Ion till Christmas morning, as they all preferred to celebrate Christmas eve at home. The children were going to hang up their stockings, but had not been told that they would have a tree or any gifts. They thought, and had said to each other, that perhaps papa might think the money he had given them to spend and to give, and the privilege of selecting objects for his benevolence, was enough from him, but the friends at Ion and Fairview always had remembered them, and most likely would do so again.

"Still they may not," Lulu added with a slight sigh when she talked the matter over with Max and Grace that morning, for the last time; "for they are all giving more than usual to missions and disabled ministers, and poor folks, and I don't know what else; but it's real fun to give to the poor round here; I mean it will be to help put things on the trees and then see how pleased they'll all be when they get 'em: at least I do suppose they will. Don't you, May?"

"I shall be very much surprised if they're not," he assented, "though I begin to find out that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' And yet for all that if I get some nice presents to-night or to-morrow I – sha'n't be at all sorry," he added with a laugh.

"Max," said Lulu reflectively, "you knew about the Christmas tree beforehand last year; hasn't papa told you whether we're to have one this time or not?"

"No, not a word; and as he tells me almost always what he intends to have done about the place," the boy went on with a look of pride in the confidence reposed in him, "I'm afraid it's pretty good evidence that we're not to have one."

For a moment Grace looked sorely disappointed; then brightening, "But I'm most sure," she said, "that papa and mamma won't let us go without any presents at all. They love us a great deal, and will be sure to remember us with a little bit of something."

"Anyway it's nice that we have something for them," remarked Lulu cheerily. "Papa helped us choose Mamma Vi's, and she advised us what to make for papa; so I'm pretty sure they'll both be pleased."

It was while waiting for their father to take them to the school-house that they had this talk, and it was brought to a conclusion by his voice summoning them to get into the carriage.

"There is no time to lose, my darlings," he said, "for it is likely to take about all the morning to trim the two rooms and two trees."

CHAPTER V

Grandma Elsie's college boys, Harold and Herbert Travilla, had come home for the holidays, arriving the latter part of the previous week. This morning they had come over to Woodburn, very soon after breakfast, "to have a chat with Vi while they could catch her alone," they said, "for with all the company that was to be entertained at Ion they might not have so good a chance again."

They stood with her at the window watching the carriage as it drove away with the captain and his children. It had hardly reached the gate leading into the high road when Harold turned to his sister with the remark,

"Well, Vi, we've had quite a satisfactory talk; and now for action. As I overheard the captain say to the children, 'there's no time to lose.'"

"No; we will begin at once," returned Violet, leading the way to the large room where the Christmas tree had been set up last year.

A couple of negro men were carrying in its counterpart at one door, as Violet and her brother entered at the other.

"Ah that's a fine tree, Jack!" she said addressing one of them; "the captain selected it, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Wi'let, de cap'n done say dis hyar one was for de Woodburn chillen; an' we's to watch an' fotch 'em in soon's dey's clar gone out ob sight."

"Yes," she said, "we want to give them a pleasant surprise. I think they are doubtful as to whether their father intends that they shall have a tree this year," she added, aside to her brothers.

"Then the surprise will be the greater," Harold returned; "and it is half the fun. I supposed they were pretty certain of the tree, and would be surprised only by the nature of the gifts."

"They will have a goodly supply of those," Violet said, with a pleased look, glancing in the direction of a table heaped with packages of various sizes and shapes. "Do you know, boys, when Christmas times come round I always feel glad I married a man with children; it's such a dear delight to lay plans for their enjoyment and to carry them out."

"Just like you, Vi," said Herbert, "and I like to hear you talk in that way; but you have your own two."

"Yes; but even Elsie is hardly old enough yet to care very much for such things."

The tree was now in place and the work of trimming it began.

"It's very good in you boys to come here and help me instead of joining in the fun they are doubtless having at the school-house," remarked Violet, as she handed a glittering fairy to Harold who was mounted upon a step-ladder alongside of the tree. "There, I think that will look well perched on that topmost bough."

"Our tastes agree," he said, fastening the fairy in the designated spot.

"Yes, I think Herbie and I are entitled to any amount of gratitude on your part, for the great self-denial we are practicing, and the wonderful exertions we shall put forth in carrying out your wishes and directions in regard to this difficult and irksome business."

"And the fine phrases and well turned periods contained in the remarks bestowed upon your unsophisticated country sister," laughed Violet.

"Of course they must not be forgotten in the reckoning up of your causes for gratitude. Ah, Vi, how my heart goes out in pity and sympathy for you when I reflect that you not only never have shared in the inestimable privileges and delights of college boy life, but are, in the very nature of things, forever debarred from participation in them!"

"I entirely appreciate your feelings on the subject," she said, with mock gravity, "but would advise that for the present you forget them, and give your undivided attention to the business in hand. That second fairy does not maintain a very graceful attitude."

"True enough," he said, promptly altering its position. "There, how's that for high?"

"Is it possible I hear such slang from the educated tongue of a college boy?" she exclaimed with a gesture of astonishment and dismay.

"She's high enough," said Herbert, gazing scrutinizingly at the fairy, "but there'd better be more work and less talk if we are to get through before the captain and his party come home."

"Herbert, when Mrs. Raymond and I have reached your venerable age you may expect to find us as sedate and industrious as you are now," remarked Harold, proceeding to hang upon the tree various ornaments, as Herbert handed them to him.

"And in Harold's case due allowance must be made for the exuberance of spirits of a boy just let out of school," added Violet.

"And in your case, my dear madam, for what? a youthful flow of spirits consequent upon a temporary release from the heavy responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood?"

"Very temporary," laughed Violet; "my husband will be here again in a few hours, and the call to attend to my babies may come at any moment."

"I daresay if the captain had consulted only his own inclination he would be here now, overseeing this job," remarked Harold, half interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Violet; "but he thought his duty called him to the other places; and I think my good husband never fails to go where duty calls. We talked it over and concluded that the best plan we could hit upon was for me to stay at home and see to this work, while he should take his children and assist at the decoration of the school-houses."

"To secure you an opportunity to prepare a pleasant surprise for them," supplemented Harold.

Their work was finished, its results surveyed with satisfaction, and the door of the room closed and locked upon it, before the return of the carriage bringing Capt. Raymond and his merry, happy little flock.

Dinner filled up the greater part of the interval between their home-coming and return to the school-house on the corner of the estate, to witness the distribution of gifts to the poor whites of the neighborhood; and by a little management on the part of their father, Violet and her brothers, they were kept from the vicinity of the room where the Christmas tree stood, and got no hint of its existence.

Their thoughts were full of the doings of the morning and the coming events of the afternoon, and their tongues ran fast on the two subjects. Their father had to remind them once or twice that older people must be allowed a chance to talk as well as themselves; but his tone was not stern, and the slight reproof, though sufficient to produce the desired effect, threw no damper upon their youthful spirits.

They were in the carriage again soon after leaving the table, Violet with them this time, Harold and Herbert riding on horseback alongside of the vehicle, for they desired a share in witnessing the bestowal of the gifts.

They found teacher and pupils there before them; every face bright with pleasurable anticipation.

The Jones children, whose mother had died the year before, and who had continued to find a good friend in Capt. Raymond, were among the number.

Grandma Elsie, Zoe, Rosie, Walter and Evelyn Leland arrived in a body soon after the Woodburn family, and then the exercises began.

The captain offered a short prayer, and made a little address appropriate to the occasion; teacher and scholars sang a hymn, a Christmas carol; then the tree was unveiled amid murmurs of admiration and delight, and the distribution of the gifts began.

Every child received a suit of warm, comfortable clothes, a book, a bag of candy, a sandwich or two, some cakes and fruit.

The tree was hung with rosy-cheeked apples, oranges, bananas, bunches of grapes and strings of popcorn. There were bright tinsel ornaments too, and a goodly array of gaily dressed paper dolls, mostly Gracie's contribution.

She had given up all her store for the gratification of the poor children.

"I've had such good times myself, playing with them and dressing them,

that I do believe the poor children, that don't have half the pleasures

I do, will enjoy them too, and I can do very well without," she said to

Lulu on deciding to make the sacrifice.

So she told her father they were not to be used merely as a temporary ornament for the tree, but to be given away to some of the younger girls attending the school.

They, along with other pretty things, were taken from the tree and presented last of all, and the delight manifested by the recipients more than made amends to Gracie for her self-denial.

From the Woodburn school-house our friends all repaired to the one at Ion, and a similar scene was enacted there. The exercises and the gifts to the children were very nearly the same, but there were older people – house servants and laborers on the estates – to whom were given more substantial gifts in money and provisions for the support of their families.

The afternoon was waning when the Raymonds again entered their family carriage and the captain gave the order, "Home to Woodburn."

And now the children began to think of the home celebration of Christmas eve, and to renew their wonderings as to what arrangements might have been made for their own enjoyment of its return. Still they asked no question on the subject, but they sobered down and were very quiet during the short drive.

"Tired, children?" queried their father, putting an arm round Grace as she leaned confidently up against him, and smiling affectionately upon them all.

"Oh, no, sir, not at all!" replied Max, quickly, straightening himself with the air of one who had no thought of fatigue.

"Not at all, papa," echoed Lulu.

"Only just a little bit, papa," Grace said with cheerful look and tone.

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