

The Family Circle

'T WAS THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS

My folks act funny nowadays—
I can't tell what is going on.
When ma comes in she always says,
'What bundles came when I was gone?'
An' if I touch a closet door
Or hunt for playthings anywhere,
Somebody runs across the floor
And says I 'mustn't go in there!'

My sister talks a heap with ma,
But whispers when I come aroun',
An' they hide things away so pa
Won't see 'em when he comes from town.
I told pa all about it, too;
He only laughed, an' said to me,
'This time o' year it's best for you
Not to observe the things you see.'

There's packages behind the bod
In ma's room. When I found them there
I ast her what they was. She said,
'Have you been looking? I declare!'
An' now they're gone; but there's a lot
Of bundles in the cellar, though,
An' ma says she won't tell me what
They arc, for I don't need to know.

Ma hides things from my sister—yes,
An' sister she hides things from ma;
They're sewin' somepin, not a dress,
An' both of them hide that from pa!
There's somepin poked behind the books,
But pa, he's gone and turned the lock;
An' near as I can see, it looks
Like somepin's hid behind the clock.

My folks acts funny—I can't see
Why they should all drop ever'thing
An' pick some errand out for me
Whenever they hear our bell ring;
An' I ain't treated right, nohow;
It don't seem just exactly fair
Wherever I am started now
One of 'em says, 'Don't go in there!'

A CHRISTMAS LEGEND

Once upon a time—it was so long ago that the whole world has forgotten the date—in a city in the north of Europe—whose name is so difficult to pronounce that nobody remembers it—once upon a time there was a little boy of seven, named Wolff, an orphan in charge of an old aunt who was hard and avaricious, who only embraced him on New Year's Day, and who breathed a sigh of regret every time that she gave him a porringer of soup.

But the poor little chap was naturally so good that he loved the old woman just the same, although she frightened him very much, and he could never see without trembling the great wart, ornamented with four gray hairs, which she had on the end of her nose.

As the aunt of Wolff was known through all the village to have a house and an old stocking full of gold, she did not dare send her nephew to the school for the poor. But she so schemed to obtain a reduction of the price with the schoolmaster whose school little Wolff attended, that the bad teacher, vexed at having a scholar so badly dressed and who paid so poorly, punished him very often and unjustly with the blackboard and fool's cap, and even stirred his fellow-pupils against him, all sons of well-to-do men, who made the orphan their scapegoat.

The poor little fellow was therefore as miserable as the stones in the street, and hid himself in out-of-the-way corners to cry; when Christmas came.

The night before Christmas the schoolmaster was to take all of his pupils to the Midnight Mass, and bring them back to their homes.

Now, as the winter was very severe that year, and as for several days a great quantity of snow had fallen, the scholars came to the rendezvous warmly wrapped and bundled up, with fur caps pulled down over their ears, double and triple jackets, knitted gloves and mittens, and good thick nailed boots with strong soles. Only little Wolff came shivering in the clothes that he wore week-days and Sundays, and with nothing on his feet but coarse Strasbourg socks and heavy sabots, or wooden shoes.

His thoughtless comrades made a thousand jests over his sad looks and his peasant's dress. But the orphan was so occupied in blowing on his fingers, and suffered so much from his chilblains, that he took no notice of them; and the troop of boys, with the master at their head, started for the church.

It was fine in the church, which was resplendent with wax candles; and the scholars, excited by the pleasant warmth, profited by the noise of the organ and the singing

to talk to each other in a low voice. They boasted of the fine suppers that were waiting for them at home.

The Midnight Mass concluded, the faithful went away, anxious for supper, and the band of scholars, walking two by two after their teacher, left the church.

Now, under the porch, sitting on a stone seat under a Gothic niche, a child was sleeping—a child covered by a robe of white linen, and whose feet were bare, notwithstanding the cold. He was not a beggar, for his robe was new and nice, and near him on the ground were seen, lying in a cloth, a square, a hatchet, a pair of compasses, and the other tools of a carpenter's apprentice. Under the light of the stars, his face, with its closed eyes, bore an expression of divine sweetness, and his long locks of golden hair seemed like an aureole about his head. But the child's feet, blue in the cold of that December night, were sad to see.

The scholars, so well clothed and shod for the winter, passed heedlessly before the unknown child. One of them even, the son of one of the principal men in the village, looked at the waif with an expression in which could be seen all the scorn of the rich for the poor, the well-fed for the hungry.

But little Wolff, coming the last out of the church, stopped, full of compassion, before the beautiful sleeping infant.

'Alas!' said the orphan to himself, 'it is too bad; this poor little one going barefoot in such bad weather. But what is worse than all, he has not to-night even a boot or a wooden shoe to leave before him while he sleeps, so that the Christ-child could put something there to comfort him in his misery.'

And, carried away by the goodness of his heart, little Wolff took off the wooden shoe from his right foot, and laid it in front of the sleeping child; and then, as best he could limping along on his poor blistered foot and dragging his sock through the snow, he went back to his aunt's.

'Look at the worthless fellow!' cried his aunt, full of anger at his return without one of his shoes. 'What have you done with your wooden shoe, little wretch?'

Little Wolff did not know how to deceive, and although he was shaking with terror at seeing the gray hairs bristle up on the nose of the angry woman, he tried to stammer out some account of his adventure.

But the old woman burst into a frightful peal of laughter.

'Ah, monsieur takes off his shoes for beggars! Ah, monsieur gives away his wooden shoe to a barefoot! That is something new for example! Ah, well, since that is so, I am going to put the wooden shoe which you have left in the chimney, and I promise you the Christ-child will leave there to-night something to whip you with in the morning. And you shall pass the day to-morrow on dry bread and water. We will see if next time you give away your shoes to the first vagabond that comes.'

And the wicked woman, after having given the poor boy a couple of slaps, made him climb up to his bed in the attic. Grieved to the heart, the child went to bed in the dark, and soon went to sleep on his pillow steeped with tears.

But on the morrow morning, when the old woman, awakened by the cold and shaken by her cough, went down stairs—oh, wonderful sight!—she saw the great chimney full of beautiful playthings, and sacks of magnificent candies and all sorts of good things; and before all these splendid things the right shoe, that her nephew had given to the little waif, stood by the side of the left shoe, that she herself had put there that very night, and where she meant to put a birch rod.

And as little Wolff, running down to learn the meaning of his aunt's exclamation, stood in artless ecstasy before all these splendid Christmas presents, suddenly there were loud cries of laughter out of doors. The old woman and the little boy went out to know what it all meant, and saw all the neighbors gathered around the public fountain. What had happened? Oh, something very amusing and very extraordinary. The children of all the rich people of the village, those whose parents had wished to surprise them by the most beautiful gifts, had found only rods in their shoes.

Then the orphan and the old woman, thinking of all the beautiful things that were in their chimney, were full of amazement. But presently they saw the cure coming with wonder in his face. Above the seat, placed near the door of the church, at the same place where in the evening a child, clad in a white robe, and with feet bare notwithstanding the cold, had rested his sleeping head, the priest had just seen a circle of gold incrustated with precious stones.

And they all crossed themselves devoutly, comprehending that the beautiful sleeping child, near whom were the carpenter's tools, was Jesus of Nazareth in person, become for an hour such as He was when He worked in His parents' house, and they bowed themselves before that miracle that the good God had seen fit to work, to reward the faith and charity of a child.—Francois Coppee.

BLESSING THE CATTLE ON CHRISTMAS MORNING

In some villages of Brittany (says the *Sacred Heart Review*), there is a sort of miracle play on Christmas Eve. The crib, as we should call it, is erected in the churches,