

## UNCLE GILBERT'S RETURN ;

OR, THE  
CHRISTMAS DECORATION OF  
THE HOME.

It was a few days before Christmas, 1883, and in the comfortable if well-worn dining-room of a London house in a quiet street, the whole Morris family lingered a few minutes after the rather late breakfast. As a rule, in that busy household there was little of such dallying—little, indeed, of the elegant leisure that allows of it ; there rarely is when the master of the house is a hard-working London physician, with a large family of all ages to maintain and to educate. On this special morning the boys were at home from school, the girls were released from governess and class, and Dr. Morris, a tender and loving father, beneath a slightly stern exterior, usually managed to give a few dearly-prized



minutes to the children when they were thus assembled.

Mrs. Morris, a gentle, quiet woman, with a face in which good temper and good sense were equally blended, was one of those mothers who are constantly appealed to by their children, male and female, and her share in all their pleasures and pains was necessarily a large one. Guided by their mother's love and tact, the Morris children had long ago penetrated beneath the stiff casing of their father's manner to the loving heart; and each of them rested securely there, quite sure of his love and care. So unrestrained, indeed, in their confidence and converse before him, that other people's children, not so happy, listened in astonishment to the family chatter and family laughter which went on, apparently uncontrolled, before so grave a father, who neither commented upon it nor seemed to take part in anything that was going on.

But though so silent, had a bystander noticed the glances passing between Dr. Morris and his children they would have understood the constant tale of sympathy and tenderness those looks betrayed; indeed, but few fathers knew better than he each child's character and growing tendencies. It was Dr. Morris who had encouraged Ethel's love of form and colour, and finally placed her in training for the Royal Academy School; it was he, too, who had discovered Muriel's yet childish fancy for his own noble profession, and was steadily encouraging and overlooking her studies; and though to all appearance the boys showed no particular predilection for special studies, Dr. Morris would probably have been able to guess at them with perfect ease.

On this particular morning there was an important family event to be talked over—no less than the somewhat unexpected visit of a brother of Dr. Morris's, who had long been settled in the northern parts of Canada, near the Georgian Bay; and who, accompanied by his wife, was coming to spend his Christmas in England for the first time since his early youth.

No wonder that the children were excited. To the boys Uncle Gilbert had been for years a dream and a subject of much conversation. He was a wonderful hunter and "dead shot," and it was his adventurous and roving disposition that had prevented his settling in England or finishing his college course, and that had carried him off on that roving life, the fancy for which would seem to be born in the Anglo-Saxon race, and makes them the colonists, *par excellence*, of the world. But Uncle Gilbert had been more fortunate than most men of his kind; his small amount of capital had been *thriftily used*, and he had settled down, married suitably, and had prospered in his far-off home. But he had no children, and Dr. Morris suspected, not without good reason, that the wanderer's return was prompted by a desire to see his sons, and find in one of them the son he longed for. Nor did he object. All the boys, he knew, must work as he had done, and make the best of the few hundreds he could leave them; and what more suitable than that one of the same blood should find home and settlement with his brother Gilbert, of whom the grave doctor thought all day to-day with moist eyes and full heart? Gilbert, tenderly loved as when they were boys, was speeding towards him along the iron rails, fast as steam could bring him. How strange it was!

But we must go back to the breakfast-table, just in time to hear that the subject of conversation had turned on the Christmas decorations of the house, about which Ethel was more than usually anxious, as they were her special care; and she had just asked her

mother how much she would give her towards purchasing the evergreens this year.

"About five shillings," said Mrs. Morris, mischievously smiling at her young daughter.

"Mother," cried Ethel, "how can you? And Uncle Gilbert, so many years away from home, will expect a perfect old-fashioned Christmas—all holly, mistletoe, and plum-pudding!"

"The plum-pudding he certainly shall have," said Mrs. Morris, "and just as much of the holly and mistletoe as you and Muriel can get for five shillings. Take Dorothy and the boys, and go down to Covent Garden early to-morrow morning, and make the most of your allowance."

"Mother," laughed Muriel, the second daughter, who had not before spoken, "I declare you are growing quite penurious in your old age. How do you expect us to decorate our ancestral halls for Christmas with five shillings?"

Even Dr. Morris laughed at the incongruity of such an amount of expenditure with Muriel's grand idea of "ancestral halls;" but Mrs. Morris proving obdurate, he finally produced ten shillings from his own purse, coupling it, however, with the proviso that his study and consulting-room in the back dining-room was not to be invaded by the decorators, and that as little holly and ivy as possible were to be used in the sitting-rooms; none in the nursery nor bed-rooms; but as much as they liked in the halls, staircase, and school-rooms.

"Oh, father!" cried Dorothy, "you haven't really left anywhere!"

"I've left quite enough for you to manage with your ten shillings, my little grammarless Dorothy," said Dr. Morris, as he escaped from his children's constraining hands and clamorous voices, which followed him to the door of his study, from whence he soon issued again to enter the waiting brougham which stood at the hall door.

Ethel and Muriel retired to the schoolroom to ponder over their intended decorations, and were soon followed to that favourite retreat by the boys and younger children. The suggested expedition to Covent Garden was one of yearly occurrence, and with the young people went nurses and children *en masse*. The first fine morning was usually chosen, and a very early start was made, so that they all got back to the family breakfast at the usual hour. It was great fun to see the bustle, the carts laden with Christmas greenery, the boxes of foreign fruit, to smell the all-pervading scent of flowers and hear the bargaining and chaffering that went on in the grey light of the morning.

"Ethel," said Muriel, "I did not think papa meant to have Christmas decorations at all this year; for last year he said he thought the gradual decay of the greenery was bad for the children, and he would not have it where they were, and certainly not in the bed-rooms. But, you know, we can use banners, and lots of Christmas pictures."

"Five shillings," said Ethel, "will get all the holly we need, and but one bunch of mistletoe is wanted. Papa's ten shillings must go to buy a few yards of scarlet, blue, and white ribbands for banners, and, I think, Muriel, we will get some of those cheap scarlet and yellow fans—the ones that open and shut, I mean—for the pictures in the drawing and dining rooms; they are about twopence each. We must have a few stalks of Pampas grass too, and some plants in pots, besides the ferns and palms already in the drawing-rooms. And I should like a few lengths of artificial ivy for the drawing-room lamps."

Muriel assented as usual to Ethel's plans, and as she was the ruling spirit amongst her younger brothers and sisters, this made them

unopposed. The next day or two were taken up with the visit to Covent Garden, and the manifold small purchases and preparations. Amongst these were the silken banners, which Ethel painted with different devices, and which the boys glued round suitable sticks; and Christmas Eve saw the three girls busily engaged in the decoration of the staircase with delicate wreaths of holly, and the family pictures with graceful sprays of the same. A small trophy of miniature flags was placed at the top of the banisters of each landing, and Ethel had painted "Welcome" on a scarlet ground, to be placed in a conspicuous position in the lower entrance-hall, which was well suited to decoration, as it was larger than usual in London houses, and had a fireplace in which a fire was kept burning during the winter to warm the upper halls.

In this lower hall were plenty of fur skins, sent home at different times by Uncle Gilbert, which were used as rugs on the tessellated floor, as well as coverings on cold days in the carriage; the latter were hung on a stand which Dr. Morris had had specially constructed, so that their beauty might be seen to advantage when fully displayed. Deers' antlers, horns, and heads also decorated the walls; and the boys looked with especial admiration on the head of a "grizzly," shot by Uncle Gilbert on some of his Rocky Mountain journeys, after a life or death struggle, every detail of which was known to them, as it had been witnessed by a well-known traveller, and described in a book. Thus the halls and staircase, as Ethel declared, were unsurpassed for their decorations at any time; and at Christmas, touched up by her tasteful hand with sprays and small wreaths of ivy and holly, they formed a subject of admiration to all their friends.

Against the dark walls of the dining-room, spread out above the pictures, were the scarlet and yellow fans, and in the tall vases a great display of Pampas grass and other dried grasses and leaves, with which green holly-leaves had been deftly mingled.

This year Ethel had been placed on her mettle, and had made wonderful use of colour, with the small amount of greenery allowed her. The palms in the drawing-room were drawn out into conspicuous places, where their shining fronds were seen against the lights, and with flags, fans, and a little Turkey red drapery, the drawing-room was changed into what Mrs. Morris called a "fairy pavilion."

Uncle Gilbert was to arrive in time for a late dinner, so a telegram from Liverpool had announced, and how the day would have passed but for the Christmas decorations, which kept the young people busy, Mrs. Morris, excited and nervous herself, did not know. The doctor, to all appearance, was too much occupied to think of the expected arrival; but she did not quite believe that all was so quiet beneath the calm exterior, and she fancied that his thoughts, like her own, dwelt with the long unseen brother whom she had known before her marriage, and with the yet unknown sister whom they were to see for the first time.

Mrs. Gilbert Morris had been the daughter of a Canadian Senator, and had been dowered with both beauty and wealth—so report said—which she had bestowed for love on Gilbert, then an unknown Englishman, poor, and only distinguished by his handsome looks.

At length the day wore over, and as the children, ready dressed and excited, waited with their mother in the drawing-room, the long-expected carriage, with its attendant cab piled with luggage, rolled to the door, and Mrs. Morris, flying down the stairs, met her husband as he entered the door, he having met the travellers at the station. Then a tall, stately figure cried out "Mary!" in excited tones—she was swallowed up in a fur coat—

while a little figure waited behind to be introduced.

"Sophie—Mary—my wife," said Gilbert, and the two sisters-in-law embraced cordially. Then the children, already devouring Uncle Gilbert with their eyes, were successively introduced and made known, beginning with the namesake and godchild "Gilbert," who was hailed with much applause and many tender welcomes.

"We think him like the Gilbert of old," remarked Dr. Morris, "and he certainly shares some of his natural characteristics, particularly where mischief is concerned."

Uncle Gilbert laughed, and kissed the boy fondly. It was so pleasant to find that he had been a cherished and beloved remembrance in his brother's home.

"Why, Sophie," he shouted merrily, looking round as they mounted the stairs, "here's all the rubbish I've been sending home since the year one collected in this hall!"

"Oh, Uncle Gilbert!" murmured the second Gilbert, whom he clasped with one arm, "you can't call the 'grizzly' rubbish, surely?"

"Well, no, my boy, I suppose not; at least, I remember I did not think him so at the time. He was a serious event in my life."

Dinner over, and the family gathered once more in the drawing-room, the elder children had time to look at their new uncle and aunt. Uncle Gilbert was taller and stouter than their father; his early life of outdoor sport and exposure had developed his fine manly beauty, and the years as they advanced were adding stateliness to his mien. "Aunt Sophie" was a perfect contrast to him. She was fair and small, with blue eyes and a happy,

laughing face. There was no doubt about either their mutual good looks or their mutual happiness—both were so evident.

"Aunt Sophie" looked about her curiously. It was her first visit to England, and Uncle Gilbert walked about the rooms with his brother, recognising familiar things, and admiring to the full Ethel's decorations, which he praised and enjoyed, to her great delight. He showed Aunt Sophie, too, the holly, laurestina, and mistletoe, and to the children's great astonishment they were told that none of them grew in Canada, and that, excepting dried specimens, Aunt Sophie was being introduced to them for the first time. Ivy Aunt Sophie knew very well, as it is much used in pots for internal decoration, being trained round doors and windows in Canada, but it will not grow in the open air.

"But," said Ethel, in bewilderment, "you do have Christmas decorations, for Uncle Gilbert has written about them in the 'log-church.' What are they made of?"

"Principally of fir," said Aunt Sophie, "which makes beautiful decorations, and especially in the form of wreaths. In the autumn I dry the brightest and best of the lovely variegated autumn leaves, and varnish them, and put them in at intervals to give colour to the green wreaths, and sometimes in clusters of half-a-dozen together; while the cones can serve as pendants. Then we have mountain-ash berries, and another berry something like an English barberry, so Gilbert says, which we gather and keep for Christmas in the cellar, either in salt and water or hung up in bunches on the wall. But our prettiest decoration in our northern latitudes is the

stag's-horn moss, which Gilbert says you have in Scotland, and of which we have a great abundance in our woods. This we pick in the autumn and hang in the coldest cellar; and at Christmas it comes forth as green as when gathered, and I do not think that anyone could have a more charming description of decoration."

"How strange," said Mrs. Morris, meditatively, "one never thinks of the different manners and customs of other lands, and of the differing skies under which Englishmen and women keep, with tender fidelity, as closely as they can to the ways and habits of their old 'Mother Country.'"

"I daresay it does seem strange to you," said Aunt Sophie, "but I have been used to it all my life, you know. I have a cousin in New South Wales," she continued, after a moment's pause, "and over there they cannot imitate any of the English winter character of Christmas; and she tells me they use, instead of holly, a lovely tree which they call the 'Christmas tree.' Its blossoms have a white corolla, and a large and conspicuous red calyx. The corollas fall off, and the red calyces give the tree the appearance of being covered with red flowers."

"After all," said Uncle Gilbert, as he drew closer to his fairy-looking wife, and looked round at his brother, "it's home, Phil, where the heart is; and, God be thanked, this year He has indeed given us all that long-prized blessing together, *i.e.*,

*A Happy Christmas.*

A CANADIAN.

## AN ENGLISH PRINCESS.

### CHAPTER III.

WHEN October set in it was deemed advisable that the Princess and her brothers should return to St. James's. The King wrote to Sir Thomas Fairfax on the 10th asking that they might be allowed to come and see him at Hampton Court about once in ten days, and to stay a night or two, on account of the distance, the winter weather, and the shortness of the days. Accordingly, later in the month they came and stayed from Saturday to Monday. It was the last of their happy meetings. On the 12th of November word came to them that their father had made his escape from Hampton Court in the darkness of the previous night.

Whatever hopes the King's flight may have raised in his children's minds were soon dispelled by the news that Charles was once more a captive in Carisbrooke Castle. But they had now an all-engrossing object before them. The King had urged on James the necessity of effecting his escape, if possible, to his sister, the Princess of Orange. Henry was too young to know anything of this, but Elizabeth shared with her brother all his plans and hopes. It was a difficult thing to attempt, so closely watched were they at all times. James wrote to his father under cover of a letter to the Princess Mary, giving details of a proposed scheme, but the letter fell into hostile hands, and only resulted in their being guarded more strictly than ever, and in James and Elizabeth never being allowed to have any private conversation. At last, however, they managed to devise a plan which was carried out successfully.

They had introduced the custom of a game of hide-and-seek in the evenings before little Henry went to bed. James prided himself on the cleverness of his hiding-places, and on the length of

time he could keep the others looking for him. On the night of the 21st of April, 1648, he ran off from the others, saying—"I shall give Harry two hours' work this evening." Hastening down to the gardener, he persuaded him to lend him the key which opened both the garden gate and a private door into the park, under pretence of hiding in the gardener's room. Possessed of this, he hurried across the garden, locked the gate behind him, donned a girl's dress, with which he had provided himself, and crossing the park to the waterside reached safely a boat which was in waiting, and which rowed him to a Dutch ship which had been lying in the river for some time in the hope of being able to embark the Prince. On board this friendly vessel James proceeded to Holland, and soon found himself in safety with the Princess of Orange and her husband.

Elizabeth had a hard part to play that night. While search was being made high and low for her brother, she alone knew the secret of his flight, and while she strove to interest herself in the search, and to betray no sign of superior knowledge, her heart must have been beating fast with hope and fear. When Lord Northumberland came to attend his charges to rest, he found the attendants still hunting vainly for the hidden Prince. As night wore on the whole household was roused. The gardener told the story of the key, but the room where he supposed the Prince to be was found empty. At last the truth came home with slow conviction to the searchers: the Duke of York was gone.

Her brother's escape must have been a sad loss to Elizabeth. Only two years older than herself, they were congenial companions, and could share all each other's thoughts and feelings, while the tender years of the Duke of

Gloucester, who was not yet seven years old, precluded her from sharing with him any of her more serious thoughts and plans.

The Earl was freed from blame in connection with the Duke of York's escape, and he obtained permission to take his remaining charges to Sion House for the summer. Here the long days passed uneventfully, save for an occasional letter received from the King, who continued in the Isle of Wight. With the close of the year the clouds thickened around the doomed monarch. Seized and brought to Hurst Castle—a prison bleak enough to arouse the darkest foreboding, as any who have seen it, standing grim and solitary at the extremity of the long neck of sand which stretches across the entrance to the Solent, will confess—and thence conducted to Windsor, the Princess could have little satisfaction in the thought of her father being nearer to her when she thought of the purpose for which he had been brought thither. In the seclusion of Sion House she was probably spared much that would have pained and distressed her had she been spending the winter as usual at St. James's, but by the end of the year the fact could no longer be concealed from her that the King was to be tried for his life. When her father inquired after his daughter's health, he was told "she was very melancholy." "And well she may be," answered Charles, "when she hears the death her old father is coming to."

During these days of terrible forebodings and suspense, the Princess petitioned the Houses of Parliament for leave to retire to her sister in Holland, but Parliament was so engrossed with weightier matters that her petition was never presented. The King's trial commenced on the 20th of January. On the 27th he was condemned to die.