

"It is very hard," she objected, "that I should be expected to knit stockings like an old granny!" Yet on reflection she took the hint so far as to learn to knit socks for the children and Martin.

But everything she was now *compelled* to do she at first grieved over as a hardship.

Even when Martin bade her keep her own earnings to clothe herself and the little ones, supplementing her small means when he could, she deplored the absolute necessity to lay the money out on the useful and serviceable rather than the ornamental. She was never idle, did her best to make little Susie useful, and never suffered the grandmother to clear the litter made by Martin or the children, or to scrub the floor sullied by tiny feet trampling in and out; but it was a woeful grievance that every drop of water had to be fetched from a spring some seventy yards away instead of from a pump close at hand.

"Well, granny, I don't know how you have managed to wash and cook and clean up all these years with water so far off," she exclaimed one day as she came in from the spring, wetted with rain, and with water she had spilled in carrying.

"Well, my lass, there are folk on the moor worse off, and I've had to make the best of it. And I soon learned that it was easier to keep clean than to make clean."

"Make the best of it!" Oh, how Catherine hated those words, which seemed to Martin and his mother a panacea for all ills!

If the weather was bad, and the children could not go out to play, or if they fell down and cut or bruised themselves, they were comforted with the phrase as surely as with kisses.

The old people had for many years maintained themselves with the produce of their

garden and poultry-yard. And whether it was wet or fine, hail or rain, the brisk old woman—she was sixty or thereabouts—trotted off over the moor to Moorcross with her basket of eggs and poultry every market day during the season, bringing back groceries and wool.

"I'm sure, mother, it's not a fit day for you to go out," urged Martin one drenching Thursday.

"Oh, my lad, eggs and chickens won't keep fresh. I must just put on my big cloak and take my umbrella. Folk as can't help themselves must make the best of things."

"Aye, mother, so they must," he acquiesced with a sigh; "but if I'd the full use of my limbs I'd make a different 'best' of it, that I would!"—and a shade passed over his face as he bent to his work, sent his taching-ends through the hole his awl had made, and drew his waxed thread tight with a jerk.

"If he meant that as a hint for me, I'm not going to take it," said Catherine to herself, as a put-down to intrusive conscience. "She's neither sugar nor salt, and won't melt with that great cloak and umbrella to keep the rain off."

Then she closed the house-door to keep out the rain, having watched the cheery grandmother trudging along with the great umbrella resting on one shoulder and a large basket under her cape on the other arm. But although she bustled about her household matters with unusual energy, she was haunted by the thought of the old woman tramping her five miles through the wind and rain so cheerfully, and could not persuade herself that *she* had made the best of things.

The old man, who had been ailing for some time, having never recovered the shock of his son's dire calamity, was sitting by the fireside with a grandchild nestling against him on

either side, and he kept conscience on the work by rambling on to Martin about the good wife the old dame had been to him, and the good friend to everybody in trouble, and how keenly he regretted his inability to lighten the heavy load she bore so uncomplainingly in her old age.

Catherine tried to sew, but as her conscience pricked, so she pricked her fingers, and down the work went in a pet. Then she took up her knitting, and spent her restless energy on that; but nothing stilled the unquiet thought that she was younger, stronger, and fitter to brave the storm than her husband's mother.

As the day sped, and the rain drove against the casements, her uneasiness sent her to the door from time to time, where nothing was to be seen but a blur of slanting rain, and she faltered a hope that "mother had met with Braithwaite's cart."

The old man grew strangely quiet as the afternoon wore, and sat with his head on one side as if intently listening.

At length the gate was heard to click, and weary footfalls sounded hollow on the stony path.

Catherine threw open wide the door, and down went Martin's last and stirrup. At the same instant the old man rose from his chair to welcome his wife with a smile, and her first glance was towards him.

Down went basket and wet umbrella. Grandmother Colbeck forgot fatigue, everything but the husband she had loved for forty years, for his face was twitching and working nervously, and he sank back in his chair unable to speak.

His anxiety had been too much for him.

In another week the chair was vacant. Grandfather was gone.

(To be continued.)

PER PARCELS POST.

By SOMERVILLE GIBNEY, Author of "Something New," "A Christmas Surprise," "A Friend in Need," etc.



O H, dear! oh, dear! what *are* we to do this Christmas?

Has no one got a new idea?" was the cry that echoed again and again through the halls of "Merlyn" some two months previous to last Christmas; for Mrs. Greyden (whose Yuletide festivities have been faithfully reported in these

pages for the benefit of you girls for the last four years), found herself in great straits in her search after a novelty.

As has been pointed out before, her guests had been literally spoilt in this direction, and had learnt to regard her entertainments as occasions on which they were certain to experience a pleasant surprise in some form or other. Therefore, she felt that it behoved her to see they were not disappointed.

As usual, many were the amusing remarks and "pumping" insinuations which reached

her long before her friends were even aware that it was her intention to give a party at all; but to these she naturally turned a deaf ear; and I can confidently assert, that until the proper moment no one in Langton, where she lived, save those actually interested in the matter, was aware of the surprise in store for them.

And little did they know of the anxious consultations, the lengthy letters, the planning, the scheming, and the thoughts which had their being before so much as the idea was hit on.

For, believe me, girls, an entertainment such as one of those Mrs. Greyden has given for several years past is not a matter that can be decided on and settled all in a moment.

For any of you who, having read the following instructions, have decided to follow in her footsteps, the matter is one of comparative child's play. The subject is given you, together with hints and directions as to the easiest way of carrying it out, and the words the characters have to speak are all provided; you have merely to adapt the idea to your own surroundings, follow the instructions, learn the words, and—let us hope—entertain your friends.

You commence when the main difficulty has been overcome—for choosing the subject *is* the main difficulty. There are so many things to be taken into consideration. In the first place it must, as far as may be, be novel in idea and bright and amusing in treatment; it must require very few representatives; the scenic effect must be telling, and require but

a small space; and lastly, the whole thing must provide occasion for the production and distribution of the presents.

This last is the rock on which most of the suggestions split. One may without much difficulty evolve a little plot or scene with picturesque surroundings and telling dialogue, but then the question arises, "How are the presents to be introduced?" and the whole idea is instantly shattered as useless.

There must be some connection between the plot and the presents. You couldn't, for instance, very well treat your audience to a dainty little pastoral à la Watteau, and after discoursing of purling brooks, bleating sheep, budding flowers, etc., suddenly introduce a large consignment of brown paper parcels of various shapes and sizes! It would look too absurd. The only possible way of treating such a combination would be by dealing with it in a burlesque spirit, as was done the year before last in the case of "A Friend in Need," described in the last Christmas Number.

But then what becomes of the daintiness of your Watteau surroundings? No; the selection of a suitable subject is the real *crux*.

I will not weary you with a description of the manner in which we cudgled our brains, and discussed again and again the pros and cons of various suggestions, until at length Mrs. Greyden "struck oil," as our American cousins say, and her idea was taken as the foundation on which to build her entertainment of 1890.

Reverting to my old plan (for I have not yet discovered a better), I will give you a

description of the affair first, and then let you into the secrets of how it was done afterwards.

As usual, the invitations were for eight o'clock, and on the guests entering the house, they found the doorways and balustrades of the staircase draped with art muslin of two colours, viz., dark salmon and light blue, with excellent effect. After leaving their wraps, they were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Greyden in the dining-room, which had been cleared for dancing, and then had tea and coffee in the morning-room. The spirit of curiosity was aroused in the breasts of some by the fact that they were not shown into the drawing-room as formerly.

As soon as they were all assembled, a gong sounded, and a move was made upstairs to the room in which "Zadkiel's Cave" had been constructed last year; and here they came face to face with a Christmas-tree. But this Christmas-tree differed in many particulars from the usual run of such like Yule-tide shrubs. In the first place, it was a snowy tree; in the second, it only bore lights, ornaments, and a multitude of cards with curious inscriptions, such as, "Is the best policy," "Pussy's in the well," "Makes a man healthy, and wealthy, and wise," etc., and lastly, the effect of the illumination was that of moonlight.

After it had been duly admired, the cards were cut off and presented, when it was found that there was one for each guest, and with these mysterious gifts they were fain to be content—for the present.

A move was then made to the drawing-room, when that portion containing the large bow-window was found to be cut off from the rest of the room by curtains extending from the ceiling to the floor. As soon as everyone had found a seat or standing room, these curtains were drawn aside, and revealed a very good imitation of the interior of a post-office as seen from the portion used by the public.

There was the mahogany-topped counter, on which were postal forms, weighing-machines, inkstands, etc., separated from the public by the usual metal grill, or screen, having a space at the bottom between it and the counter through which to hand money, and receive stamps and forms, while the back walls were hung with postal notices and bills connected with foreign mails, etc.

The illusion was capitally carried out, and after a few moments, in which the audience expressed their amusement and delight, a female clerk—Miss Sappho Briggs—was seen advancing from behind the curtain on the left-hand side (as seen by the audience). In her

left hand she carried a large sheet of paper with some writing on it, and in her right a pencil. As she came into view she raised her eyes and arms towards the ceiling, and with great emphasis and still greater gesticulation, exclaimed—

Oh! vasty empyrean!

With many a cloudlet decked;

A large one and a wee 'un—

(Then slowly thinking)—Ti tum, ti tum, ti
—specked.

(Turning towards audience, she lays the paper on the counter, and placing her elbows also on it, rests her chin on her hands, and while looking intently at the paper, continues)—

That "vasty empyrean's" rather good;

To-day I'm in a most poetic mood.

And wee 'un as a rhyme is rather neat,

Though how I'm going to fill the last line's
feet

I don't quite see. (Pauses, and then writes rapidly.) Ah! yes! of course that's it—

(tapping counter with pencil at each word)—

Ti tum, ti tum, ti tum, ti tum—just fit.

(taking up paper and reading with much gesticulation as before)—

Oh! vasty empyrean!

With many a cloudlet decked;

A large one and a wee 'un

Are on thy bosom specked.*

* * * * *

The next verse now (pause). Oh! lambent,
lurid love!

(To rhyme with which of course I'll use—above)

Oh! lambent, lurid love!—That doesn't scan
(pause).

Oh! love most lamentable! It is an

Eternal source of trouble and dismay

To me that metre always stops the way.

Metre and rhyme—Oh! why were they in-
vented?

They drive me oftentimes almost demented.

(Writes with some pauses, as if thinking, repeating the words as she sets them down)—

Oh! love most lamentable,

On purple pinions bear

Me—that is, if you're able—

Ti tum, ti tum—the air.

(Then extravagantly.) There's pathos in these
lines—poetic fire,

That breathes a yearning hope, a mad desire.

* The lines between the asterisks may be omitted if the representation is considered too long, as was the case at "Merlyn."

And I who pen them—oh! relentless fate—
Am fettered to vile work from eight till eight!
My soul revolts at its prosaic task—

I, who but ask to be allowed to bask
Upon Parnassus' slope, and sing my lays
In sounding numbers to the Nights and Days—
I, whose each thought with poesy's imbued,
By Government am cribbed, confined, and
mewed

Within this office, fast behind this grill.

For what?—(excitedly)—I ask, for what?

That I should fill

The place with poetry in tripping flow,
Until it answers back with laughter? No!
That I should deal out stamps—aye, ha'penny
ones,

And fill in licences for dogs and guns!

That I should for the sordid Savings-Bank

Receive and pay out cash—oh! thought most
rank!

And postal-orders sell for filthy lucre,

And cash them too, alike for lordly duke or

Lowly slave; and by the telegraph

Put back the dinner, wake the tear, or laugh;

Announce the fact that "sheetings" have

gone down,

Or that papa has missed his train from town!

That I should take in parcels—yes, and weigh
them!

And be blown up if I by chance delay them!

That I our good Queen's head with noisome
ink

Should foul and smirch all o'er! Well may
I shrink

From such like deeds, so very commonplace,
By sweet romance untinged, untouched by
grace.

I do shrink from them—hate them and abhor
them;

But still the fact remains—I can't ignore
them,

Since they, alas! to me mean bread and butter.

And did I not perform them, then to utter

Destitution I should be the prey,

Since poetry, alas! now does not pay!

And so, like some sweet songster, erstwhile
free,

Now caged, and robbed of all save melody,

I mourn my woeful fate and cruel wrong

In broken-hearted lilt and grief-tuned song.

And even this one pleasure I may not

Enjoy at will; it ever is my lot,

When some grand thought is surging through
my brain,

To interrupted be again—aye, and again.

But peace! poor heart! forget your anguish
sore,

And seek relief in poetry once more.

* * * * *

(She takes up the paper and reads, as in
the case of the first verse)—

Oh! love most lamentable,

On purple pinions bear

Me—that is, if you're able—

Ti tum, ti tum—the air.

Enraptured through the air? No; that's not
grand;

It must be something folk don't understand;
That they've to puzzle o'er with much hard
frowning,

Vide the late Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Then you're a genius, mystic, wondrous, rare.
I've got it now! Heart swooning through
the air.

I don't know what that means—no more will
they.

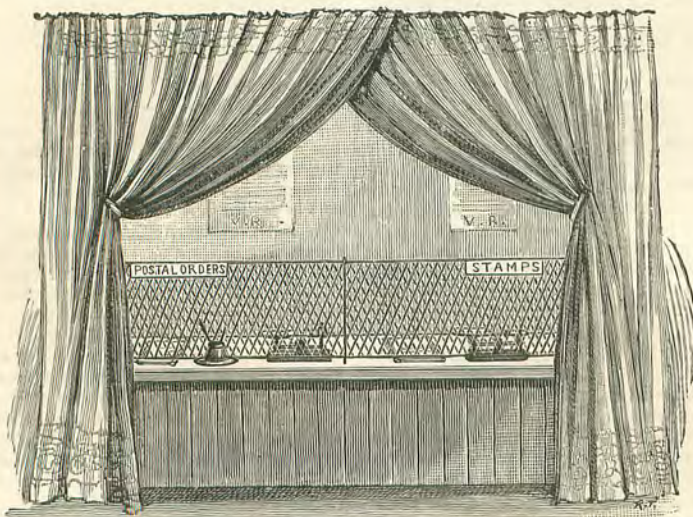
A VOICE (out of sight). A stamp, please,
miss!

SAPPHO (vexed). I said so; that's
the way.

I'm always—

A VOICE. Stamp, please, miss!

SAPPHO (retiring out of sight, and re-
turning). I'm coming, boy!



'Tis thus that trifles great minds oft annoy.
And now that phrase is gone—(throws penny
into drawer).

ANOTHER VOICE. I say, miss, please,
A telegraph form—quick!

SAPPHO. Oh! do not tease.
I'm busy.

VOICE. Busy! Well, you're paid to be!
(She goes to the side with the form.)
Hard work with you girls don't seem to agree.

SAPPHO. Girls! Hoity! toity! we're
young ladies!

VOICE. Oh!
Well, just you tot up that, and let me know
What I've to pay.

(She goes to side, and takes form and reads
it over aloud.)

SAPPHO (reading)—“Not home to-night to
dine.
Get steak and onions ready; supper nine.”

(She runs over the words with her pencil,
counting, and then enters the number on the
form.)

That's sixpence. (Takes money, gives stamp).
There's the stamp; now stick it there.

VOICE (chaffing). She won't do even that!
Well, I declare!

SAPPHO. Such rudeness! Horrid wretch!
It's nothing new;

Folk seem to think we've nothing else to do
But wait on them. Dear me! What was
that phrase

I hit on sometime since? All these delays
My genius cramp. (She devotes herself to her
paper.)

(Enter behind the grill TOM TAPP, a post-
man. He goes up close to her.)

TAPP. I say, Miss Briggs, look here!

SAPPHO. Well, Tapp, what is it? (looking
up.)

TAPP. Things is werry queer,
And not as 'ow they should be.

SAPPHO. What's amiss?

TAPP. Well, many things—particularly
this.

You know, Miss Sappho, I knocks off for tea
At four o'clock—

SAPPHO. Well, what is that to me?
(She returns to her writing.)

TAPP. Not much, perhaps; to me it
means a lot.

I knocks off sharp because I likes it 'ot—
My tea, I mean. Well, this 'ere arter-
noon—

SAPPHO (vexed). But what's all—

TAPP. I'm a-coming to it soon.
My mate, Joe Wright (you know him, miss),
he says,

Says he to me—

SAPPHO (excitedly). Heart swooning was
the phrase.

TAPP (astonished). No; nothing of the
kind. He says, says he,

“Tom Tapp, as soon as you comes back
from tea,

This load of parcels must go out to-night;
I'll get 'em all packed up for you.” “All
right,”

I says, quite nat'ral like—(You see, I knowed
I'd have to go). “Start in the Old Town
road,

And work back home,” says he. “I under-
stand,”

I says—

SAPPHO (looking up from her paper).
Heart swooning's really, truly grand.

TAPP (indignantly). You're not attending,
miss!

SAPPHO. Oh, yes—get on!

TAPP. Well, then, when I had been my
full hour gone—

(I allus takes my hour)—I comes back straight,
And finds 'em ready, so no need to wait.

And off I goes right to the Old Town road,
And precious heavy work I found that load.

Beneath the gas I takes a parcel out
For the address—

SAPPHO (crossly, looking up). What is
this all about?

TAPP. I'm just a-telling you. But no
address

Could I discover, but some silliness
About Jack Horner. “Well,” thinks I,
“dear me,

There is a name—that's sum'ut. Let me see
If there's a Horner living in the road!”
But bless yer! miss, there was not one as
known

The name, much more the house. With that
I tried

Another parcel, and another—I'd
The whole heap on the pavement, but could
not

Find one address in all the blessed lot.
There was a something wrote on each, but I
Could make no sense of it; 'twas poetri.

SAPPHO (starting up). What! Poetry!
Then let me see them here.

You brought them back?

TAPP. I did, miss, never fear.

SAPPHO. Then fetch them in—(pushing
TAPP off). When poetry's on hand,
I must be there; it's what I can't withstand.

Perhaps I now may read some thoughts
divine—

Not for a moment that they'll equal mine.

(Re-enter TAPP, with a sack of parcels on
his back, which SAPPHO helps him to set down.)

TAPP. There! Here, Miss Briggs, you see
there's no addresses,

And if I'd left them on the strength of
guesses,

I might have made mistakes. Now I want
you

To wire to Raikes,* and ask what we're to do.
Raikes should smooth matters.

SAPPHO. Well, I'll soon do that—
Raikes must be told regarden what you're at.

TAPP. Hoe! fie! Miss Briggs—a joke!
SAPPHO. A joke from me!
Poets don't joke—they utter jeux d'esprit.

(Exit to side, when the clicking of a tele-
graph is heard.)

TAPP. No matter; ask him quickly to reply;
I don't mean sticking here all night—not I.

SAPPHO (entering). There! Now while
we are waiting his command,

I'll read you something mystic, wondrous,
grand;

A little thing I knocked off—

TAPP (decidedly). Not to-night;
Thanks very much, but I must talk to
Wright.

(Bell heard.) Ah! there's the call. (Aside.)
Oh, joy! I'm saved in time

From being maddened by her raving rhyme.
(Aloud.) Go, see from whom it is, and what
about;

I'll take it down if you will call it out.

(SAPPHO goes out of sight; the clicking of
the receiving machine is again heard. She
calls out the following message slowly, while
TAPP at counter repeats the words as he writes
them down.)

* The above lines were of course written during the
lifetime of the late Postmaster-General, and as this
is an authentic account of what took place, I have
allowed them to remain. More applicable ones will
easily be written by any Miss Sappho Briggs among
my readers.

“RAIKES to BRIGGS. Take parcels to
'Merlyn.' Tell Mrs. GREYDEN to give them
away to anyone who can prove claim to them
by supplying missing portion of superscriptions.
Don't bother me again. Just going out to
dinner.”

(Re-enter SAPPHO.)

TAPP. That's better. Well, I'll take
them straight along;

This message, too, and then I can't be wrong.
You'd best come with me—come just as you
are;

From here to “Merlyn” is not very far.

(TAPP shoulders his sack, and comes through
the curtain at one side into the room, closely
followed by SAPPHO, to whom Mrs. GREYDEN
stands waiting.)

(To Mrs. GREYDEN.) Good evening, mum.
This lot (it's heavy, mum,

Tremenjus heavy), not long since has come
For you. Well, not exactly, mum, for you,
But our boss up in town has wired you knew
Who they was for; and so I've brought
them here—

You'll find all the addresses desp'rate queer.
They're bits of poetry, as I makes out,

But this young party (indicating SAPPHO,
who is all the time studying her paper),
knows what they're about—

Or says she does. She calls herself a poet,
And may be one for all I know, and so it
Occurred to me she'd help. But my advice
Is, do not let her spout at any price,
Or you'll not stop her.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Thank you, Tapp; all right.

SAPPHO (looking up from her paper.)
Madam, I'll read you—

Mrs. GREYDEN. There's no time to-night.

TAPP. Look here! Miss Briggs; you've no
time now to shirk—

This ain't the post-office, so you must work.
(To audience.) And now, good folk, what
you have got to do,

Is to conclude the rhymes called out to you.

(Mrs. GREYDEN then took a parcel from
TAPP's sack, and read out the sentence form-
ing the address; for instance, “Pat a cake,
Pat a cake, Baker's man,” to which the
fortunate individual having the card bearing
the remainder of the quotation read it out;
and having substantiated his claim according
to the Postmaster-General's directions, received
his gift, and retired into the background to
examine it. In this way some eighty odd gifts
were distributed, quite filling three sacks,
which TAPP brought forward as required.)

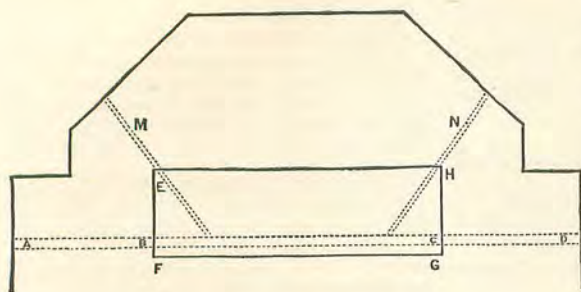
At the conclusion of the distribution the
guests were excluded from the drawing-room
for a time, while it was being prepared for an
exhibition of conjuring, which always forms
part of the entertainment at “Merlyn.”

And now it is quite time to tell you how it
was done. And this will hardly require as
minute explanations and directions as last year,
for the scenery was not nearly so intricate, and
yet many people considered it quite as effec-
tive, though in a different way, as “Zadkiel's
Cave” of the previous year. I shall be able
to make my explanation more clear by the aid
of a ground plan, which I give on page 174.

The dark lines give you the shape of the
bow-window, which you will see took up nearly
the entire end of the room. The first thing
we did was to wedge a piece of timber about
three inches in depth by an inch and a half in
width between the two side walls, a little
below the ceiling (shown by the dotted lines
marked A. B. C. D.). E. F. G. H. was the counter,
made of boards with the top stained to repre-
sent mahogany, and the front papered with
that wall-paper resembling wood. At the
ends of the counter at B. and C. two supports
reaching from the floor to the cross-piece were

fastened, and the cross-piece was fastened to these; it was further steadied by two light struts, M. and N., which had their ends fixed above the window-frames, so that the whole thing was as firm as a rock. We had a light frame of rod-iron made, on which was stretched ordinary wire netting of about one inch mesh, and this was screwed on to the counter about three inches from the front edge, and represented the usual grill, a space of about three inches being left between the bottom of the grill and the counter, for customers to pass in their money.

A glance at the sketch on page 172 will show you how we arranged the curtains.



They were tacked on to the piece of wood A. B. C. D. somewhat fully, and overlapped each other about a foot in the centre. When the time came for the commencement they were pulled back, and confined by two cords fixed about six feet from the ground on the upright at B. and C. The lighting was managed with two oil-lamps having reflectors, hanging on these same uprights above the curtain cords, and one on the counter itself, but shaded from the audience by a card bearing a postal notice, or something of that kind.

The back of our post-office was formed by the rightful curtains of the bow-window, on

which we fastened such notices as we could get hold of. But we missed something which you girls can correct, and that is, to have a clock hanging upon the back wall. It will be observed in the sketch that the grill is continued behind the curtains on either side. This gave the audience the idea that it was carried much farther either way, and that therefore they were only having a glimpse of part of the office; and the voices of the boy asking for a stamp, and the man sending off a telegraph, were thus accounted for. The fact was, our stock of actors was very small, and we had to economise, and make Tom Tapp represent three individuals, two of whom were only heard. But there is no reason why visible representatives should not enter the room through the audience, and make their way up to the counter, transact their business, and retire: the illusion would certainly be truer.

The imitation of the clicking of the telegraph instrument caused us considerable anxiety and many experiments, which finally resulted in the use of two bone knitting-needles striking each other.

For the postal bags containing the presents we used

ordinary sacks, but of course with no name on them.

Sappho was plainly dressed in an ordinary black dress, with white collar and cuffs.

Tapp's uniform gave more trouble. A tailor made the tunic with red collar and braid round the cuffs, and brass buttons; ordinary dress trousers were worn, and the cap was hired from a hat-maker, and was really a very old-fashioned volunteer shako with a red band round it. In this instance (though it is by no means absolutely necessary), Tapp "made up" old, with a semi-bald wig and iron-grey *crêpe* eyebrows, moustache, and beard. I have given

full particulars and instructions with regard to this in former Christmas Numbers, so there will be no need to repeat them here.

The part of Tapp can be played according to the fancy of his representative. His accent can be a provincial or a cockney one: the only thing to be guarded against is that it must not be *too* refined. You will require a prompter, not necessarily to prompt, but to "work" the telegraph and the call bell; and the knowledge that there is one in case of need will often prevent a young actor from forgetting his part through nervousness.

And now let me conclude with the advice I gave last year, namely, do not spare rehearsals—you will need them in plenty, I am certain. The dialogue is catchy, and it will lose much of what little virtue it may possess unless it goes without a hitch. Your scenery you will find much easier this year than last, so you will be able to devote more attention to the dialogue. The difficulties are not great, so go at them boldly: you will soon overcome them, and, I trust, afford your friends a novel and pleasing entertainment.

One final word about another part of the entertainment, viz., the snowy Christmas-tree by moonlight. The snow was represented by cotton wool laid all along the branches and sprays, and had a most picturesque effect. But you must be most careful that it is out of the way of the lamps, for on fire touching it, it flares up more like gun-cotton than anything else; and since our own experience of its bad habit, we have had another terrible warning in the dreadful disaster when so many little girls, arrayed in it to represent snowflakes, caught fire, and some of them lost their lives.

For the moonlight effect, all the lights on the tree were enclosed in little opal glass lamps, such as are so much used at illuminations. But I fancy an even better effect would have been attained had blue glass lamps been substituted for the white ones. However, this is an experiment you can decide for yourselves.

A LONELY LASSIE.

By SARAH TYTLER, Author of "A Young Oxford Maid," etc.

CHAPTER X. AN UNRULY LAD.

FOR a little time after the family in Kensington Square were thus doubly bereft, affairs went on with a smoothness which was too unruffled to last. Everybody's behaviour was nearly perfect. Even Dick, when he came home, was enough subdued to abstain from idle escapades. But the tension slackened, especially when the fears of youth, easily quieted, were entirely dispelled by letters from Mrs. Bennet announcing her safe arrival, and communicating the cheerful intelligence that she had not found Mr. Bennet so ill as she had expected—in fact, the attack was passing off; but till it was fairly gone, it was impossible to say when they would return. Naturally the family spirits went up at a bound, until they had reached the height of the boy and girls' enjoying the practical absence of restraint which their position implied. The young Bennets were anything rather than destitute of regard for their father and mother; but to be virtually left to pursue

their own devices was a pleasing variety on Mrs. Bennet's vigilant *régime* and laws as incontestable as were those of the Medes and Persians. If the girls could not quite do what they liked, for a few weeks they came nearer to it than they had ever done before, even on an acknowledged holiday. It was several weeks of holiday stretching out indefinitely before the holiday-makers; and though holidays may grow tiresome in the end, they are not so in the beginning. Even Flora was conscious of the exhilaration of being more her own mistress than she had been since she ceased to be the mistress of the manse of Inverlochan. They were all on their honour, Flora kept anxiously reminding her companions, and it was to be hoped they would not forfeit their honour; but nevertheless it was true what Mary said in her half-childish, half-quaint way, that whereas they had all been just as if they were sitting in church when first mamma went away, they were now like snails with their horns out of their shells, ready to crawl up the garden wall and

get over at any moment. The passion for freedom expressed itself differently. Dick discovered no end of old cronies in town, and showed an inclination to disappear with one or other of them to innumerable cricket and football matches, rows on the river, dinners, suppers, concerts, etc. Dick was quite different from the girls—"a man at college," with college limitations no doubt, but these he was apt to keep in the background. He did not come to the same extent under his mother's jurisdiction; and if he had done so she had a very soft spot in her heart for her son, and was proud of his spirit and manliness. "Masterly inactivity" was at present Mr. Bennet's policy with "the boy." His father left Dick very much to himself in these days. The elder man might at any moment turn on the younger one, in one of those spurts of prompt and decisive action which Mr. Bennet exercised in his business on occasions, and might considerably astonish Master Dick; but this had not happened yet.