

Poetry.

DO THEY MISS ME AT HOME.

Do they miss me at home, do they miss me,
It would be an assurance most dear,
To know at this moment some loved one
Was saying I wish he was here;
To know that the group at the fire side
Was thinking of me as I roam.
Oh! yes, it would be joy beyond measure,
To know that they miss me at home.

When twilight approaches—the season
Which ever is sacred to song,
Does some one repeat my name over,
And sigh that I tarry so long.
And is there a chord in the music,
That is missed when my voice is away,
One chord in each heart that awaketh
Regret at my wearisome stay.

Do they set me a chair near the table,
When evening's home pleasures are nigh,
When candles are lit in the parlor,
And stars in the calm azure sky;
And when the good nights are repeated,
And all laid them down to their sleep,
Do they think of the absent, and wait me
A whispered good night, while they weep.

Do they miss me at home, do they miss me,
At morning, at noon, or at night,
And lingers one gloomy shade round them,
Which only my presence can light.
Are joys less invitingly welcome,
Or pleasures less hale than before,
Because one is missed from the circle,
Because I am with them no more.

Select Tale.

A CHRISTMAS TALE.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

A whole year of Christmas days have come and passed, since a wealthy tun-maker, named Jacob Elsen, was chosen Syndic of the corporation of tun-makers, in the town of Stromthal, in Southern Germany. His family name is not to be met with, perhaps, anywhere now. The town itself is gone.—The inhabitants once unjustly taxed the Jews who dwelt there, with the murder of some little children, and drove them out; forbidding any Jew to enter their gates again. But the Jews took their quiet revenge; for they built another town at a distance, and carried all the trade away, so that the new town gradually increased in wealth, while the old town dwindled to nothing.

But Jacob Elsen had no knowledge of this persecution. In his time, Jews walked about the sombre, winding streets, and traded in the market places, and kept shops, and enjoyed with others, the privileges of the town.

A river flows through the town, a narrow winding stream, navigable for small craft, and called the "Klar." This river, being of very pure, sweet water, and moreover very useful for the commerce of the town, the people call their great friend.—They believe that it will heal ills of mind and body; and although many afflicted persons have dipped in it, and drunk of the water, without feeling much the better for it, their belief remains the same.—They give it feminine names, as if it were a beautiful woman or a goddess. They have innumerable songs and stories about it, which the people knew by heart; or did in Jacob Elsen's time—for there were very few books and fewer readers in those days. They have a yearly festival, called the "Klaifussday," when flowers and ribbons are cast into the stream, and float away through the meadows towards the great river.

"Is not the Klar," said one of their old songs, "a marvel among rivers? Lo, all other streams are nourished, drop by drop, with dews and rains; but the Klar comes forth, full grown from the hills." And this indeed was no invention of the poet; for no one knew the source of the river. The town council had offered a reward of five hundred golden gulden to any one who could discover it; but all those who had endeavoured to trace it, had come to a place many leagues above Stromthal, where the stream wound between steep rocks; and where the current was so strong that neither oar nor sail could prevail against it. Beyond those rocks were the mountains called the Himmalgebrige; and the Klar was supposed to raise in some of those inaccessible regions.

But though the people of Stromthal honored their river, they loved their commerce better. Therefore, they made no public walks along its banks; but built their houses mostly to the water's brink on both sides. Some, indeed, in the outskirts had gardens; but in the centre of the town, the stream caught no shadows, except from warehouses and the overhanging fronts of ancient wooden houses.—

Jacob Elsen's house was one of these. The sides of the bank before it had been lined with birch stakes, and the foundation was dug so close to the water, that you might open the door of the workshop and dip a pitcher in the stream.

Jacob Elsen's household consisted of only three persons besides himself; namely, his daughter Margaret; his apprentice Carl; and one old servant woman. He had workmen, but they did not sleep in the house. Carl was a youth of eighteen, and his master's daughter being a little younger, he fell in love with her—as all apprentices did in those days. Carl's love for Margaret was pure and deep. Jacob knew this; but he said nothing. He had faith in Margaret's prudence.

Whether Margaret loved Carl at this time none ever knew but herself. He went to church with her on Sundays; and there, while the prayers that were sometimes mere meaningless sounds to him, through his thinking of her, and watching her, he could hear her devoutly murmuring the words; or when the preacher was speaking, he saw her face was turned towards him, and felt almost vexed that she was listening attentively. She could sit at table with him, and be quite calm, when he felt confused and awkward; at other times she seemed always too busy to think of him. At length his apprenticeship being completed, the time came for his leaving Elsen's house to travel, as German workmen are bound by their trade laws to do; and he determined to speak boldly to Margaret before he went. What better time could he have found for this, than a summer evening, when Margaret happened to come into the workshop after his fellow workmen were gone? He called her to the door that opened on the river, to look out at the sunset, and he talked about the river; and the mystery of its source; when it was getting dusk, and he could delay no longer, he told her his secret; and Margaret told him in return her secret, which was, that she loved him too. "But," said she, "I must tell my father this."

That night, after supper they told Elsen what had passed between them. Jacob was a man in the prime of life. He was not avaricious, but he was prudent in all things. "Let Carl," he said, "come back after his Wanderzeit is ended, with fifty golden gulden; and then, if you are willing to marry him, I will make him a master tun-maker." Carl asked no more than this. He did not doubt of being able to bring back that sum, and he knew that the law would not allow him to marry until his apprenticeship was ended. He was anxious to be gone. On the morrow he took his leave of Margaret,—early in the morning, before anything was stirring in the streets. Carl was full of hope, but Margaret wept as they stood upon the threshold.—"Three years," she said, "will sometimes work such changes in us that we are not like our former selves."

"And yet they will only make me love you more," replied Carl.

"You will meet with fairer women than I where you are going," said Margaret, "and I shall be thinking of you at home, long after you have forgotten me."

"Now I am sure you love me, Margaret," he said, delighted; "but you must not have doubts of me while I am away. As surely as I love you now, I will come back with the fifty golden gulden, and claim your father's promise."

Margaret lingered at the door, and Carl looked back many times until he turned an angle of the street. His heart was light enough in spite of their separation, for he had always looked forward to this journey as the means of winning her hand; and every step he took seemed to bring him nearer his object. "I must not lose time," said he, "and yet it would be a great thing if I could find the head of our river. My way lies southward; I will try!" On the third day he took a boat at a little village, and pulled against the stream; but in the afternoon, he drew near the rocks, and the current became stronger. He pulled on, however, until the steep gray walls were on each side of him, and looking up, he saw only a strip of sky; but at length, with all the strength of his arms, he could only keep his boat where it was. Now and then, with a sudden effort, he advanced a few yards, but he could not maintain the place he had won, and after a while he grew weary, and was obliged to give it up and drift back again. "So what has been said about the rocks and the strength of the water is true," thought he, "I can testify to that at least."

Carl wandered for many days before he got employment; and, when he did, it was poorly paid, and scarcely sufficed for his living; so he was obliged to depart again. When half his time was completed, he had scarcely saved ten "gold gulden," though he had worked hundreds of miles and worked in many cities. One day he set out again, to seek for employment elsewhere. When he had been walking several days, he came to a small town

on the banks of a river, whose waters were so bright that they reminded him of the Klar. The town, too, was so like Stromthal, that he could almost fancy that he had made a great circuit and came back to his starting place again. But Carl did not want to go home yet. His term was only half expired, and his ten gold gulden (one of which was already nibbled in travelling), would make a poor figure after his boast of returning with fifty. His heart was not so light as when he quitted Margaret at the door of her father's house. He had found the world different from his expectations of it. The harshness of strangers had soured him, and there was no pleasure that day in being reminded of his native town. If he had not been weary, he would have turned aside and gone on his journey without stopping; but it was evening and he wanted some refreshment.

He walked through straggling streets that reminded him still further of his home, until he came to the market place, in the midst of which stood a large white statue of a woman. She held an olive branch in her hand; her head was bare, but folds of drapery enveloped her, from the waist to the feet. "Whose is this statue?" asked Carl of a bystander. The man answered in a strange dialect, but Carl understood him.

"It is the statue of our river," he answered.

"What is your river called?"

"The Geber—for it enriches the town, enabling us to trade with many great cities."

"And why is the head of the woman bare while her feet are hidden?"

"Because we know where the river rises, but where it flows none know."

"Can no one float down with the current and see?"

"It is dangerous to search; the stream grows swifter, running between high rocks, until it rushes into a deep cavern, and is lost."

"How strange," thought Carl, "that this town should be, in so many respects, so like my own!" But a little further on in a narrow street, he found a wooden house with a small tun hanging over the doorway, by way of sign, so like Jacob Elsen's house, that if the words "Peter Schonfuss, tun-maker to the Duke," had not been written above the door, he would have thought it magic. Carl knocked here, and a young woman came to the door; here the likeness ended, for Carl saw at a glance that Margaret was a hundred times more beautiful than she.

"I do not know whether my father wants workmen," said the young woman; "but if you are a traveller, you can rest and refresh yourself until he comes in."

Carl thanked her and entered. The low-roofed kitchen, so like Elsen's house, did not surprise him, for most rooms were built thus at that time. The girl spread a white cloth, gave him some cold meat and bread, and brought him some water to wash; but while he was eating she asked him many questions concerning whence he came, and where he had been. She had never heard of Stromthal, for she knew nothing of the country beyond the "Himmelbirge." When her father came in, Carl saw that he was much older than Jacob Elsen.

"And so you want employment?" asked the father.

Carl bowed, standing with his cap in his hand.

"Follow me!" The old man led the way into the workshop—through the door of which, at the bottom, Carl saw the river—and putting the tools into Carl's hands, bade him continue the work of a half-finished tun. Carl handled his tools so skillfully, that the old man knew him at once to be a good workman, and offered him better wages than he had ever got before.

Carl remained here until his three years had expired. One day he said to Bertha Schonfuss (his master's daughter), "My time is up now, Bertha, to-morrow I set out for my home."

"I will pray for a happy journey for you," said Bertha, "and that you may find joy at home."

"Look you, Bertha," said Carl, "I have seventy golden gulden, which I have saved. Without these, I could not have gone home, or married my Margaret, of whom I have told you; and, but for you, I should not have had them. Ought I not to remember you gratefully while I live?"

"And come back to see us one day?" said Bertha. "Of course you ought."

"I surely will," said Carl, tying the money in the corner of a handkerchief.

"Stay!" said Bertha. "There is danger in carrying much money in these parts. The roads are infested with robbers."

"I will make a box for the money," said Carl.

"No; put them in the hollow handle of one of your tools. It is natural for a workman to carry tools. No one will think of looking there."

"No handle would hold them," replied Carl. "I will make a hollow mallet, and put them in the body of it."

"A good thought," said Bertha.

Carl worked the next day, and made a large mallet, in which he plugged a hole; letting in fifty gold pieces, he retained the remainder of his treasure to expend on his journey, and to buy clothes and other things; for he could afford to be extravagant now. When everything was ready, he hired a boat to travel down the river a portion of his journey. The old man bade him farewell affectionately, at the landing-place of his own workshop; and Carl kissed Bertha, and Bertha bade him take care of his mallet.

The boy who rowed the boat was the ugliest boy that could possibly be. He was very short in the legs, and very broad in the chest, and he had scarcely any neck; but his face was large and round, and he had two small and twinkling eyes. His hair was black and straight; and his arms were long, like the arms of an ape. Carl did not like the look of him when he hired the boat and was about to choose another from the crowd of boatmen at the landing-place, when he thought how unjust it was to refuse to give the boy work on account of his ugliness, and so turned back and hired him.

Carl sat at the stern, and the boy rowed, bending forward until his face nearly touched his feet, and then throwing himself almost flat upon his back, and taking such pulls with his long arms, that the boat flew onward like a crow. Carl did not rebuke him, for he was too anxious to get home. But the boy grew bolder from his licence. He made horrible grimaces when he passed other boats, tempting the rowers to throw things at him. He raised his oars sometimes, and struck at a fish, playing on the surface; and, each time, Carl saw the dead fish lying on its back on the top of the water. Carl commanded the horrible boy to row on and be quiet—but he replied in an uncouth dialect which Carl could scarcely understand, and a moment after began his tricks again. Once Carl saw him to his astonishment, spring from his seat, and run along the narrow gunwale of the boat; but his naked feet clung to the edge, as if he had been web-footed.

"Sit to your oars, monkey?" cried Carl, striking him a light blow.

The boy sat down sullenly and rowed on, playing no more tricks that day. Carl sang one of the songs about "Klar;" and the boat continued its way—through meadows, where the banks were lined with bulrushes, and often round little islands—till the dusk came down from Heaven. The river-surface glistened with a faint white light.—The trees upon the bank grew blacker, and the stars spread westward. Carl watched the fish making circles on the stream, and let his hand fall over the side to feel the water rippling through his fingers as the boat went on. But growing weary after a while, he wrapped himself in his cloak, and placing his mallet beside him, lay down in the stern and fell asleep. The town where they were to stop that night, was further off than they had thought it. Carl slept a long time and dreamed. But in his sleep he heard a noise close to his head, like a splash in the water and awoke. He thought, at first, that the boy had fallen into the river; but he saw him standing up, midway in the boat.

"What is the matter?" said Carl.

"I have dropped your hammer in the stream," said the boy.

"Wretch!" cried Carl, springing up; "how was this?"

"Spare me, my master," said the boy with an ugly grin. "It flew out of my hand as I tried to strike a flying bat." Carl was furious. He struck at him several times; but the boy avoided him, slipping under his arm, and running again along the gunwale. Carl became still more furious, and fell upon him at once, so violently, that the boat overturned, and they both fell into the river. And now, Carl finding that the boy could not swim, thought no more of the mallet but grasped him, and struck out for the bank. The current was strong and carried them far down; but they came ashore at last. They could see the lights of the town near at hand, and Carl walked on sullenly, bidding the boy follow him. When he came near the town gate, he turned and found that the boy was gone. He called to him, and turned back a little way, and called again; but he had no answer; and at last he walked on and saw the boy no more.

Carl could not sleep that night. At daylight he offered nearly all the money he had retained, for a boat, and set out alone down the river. He thought that his mallet must have floated, in spite of the weight of the gold pieces, and he hoped to overtake it. But though he looked every way as he went along, and though he rowed on all day without resting he saw nothing of it. He passed no more islands. The banks became very desolate and lonely. The wind dropped. The water was dark, as if a thunder-cloud hung over it. And now the stream ran swifter, winding between rocks like the Klar. The wall on each side became higher and