

The Midwife.

A Happy Christmas.

Nurse Jones comes into her bright little room in the East End with a sigh of pleasure, and plants her bag viciously on the shelf.

"And I hope you'll stay there till to-morrow morning," says she to herself, "for I have been on the go ever since eleven last night, when just as I had dropped off Mrs. Smith sent for me, and when I got to her I found it was to say that she didn't want me then, but she thought it probable she might in a few hours. I never was so mad in my life, but I will say Mr. Smith did his best to soothe me on the way back, by offering me a 'drop of something,' as we passed the Duke's Head. He couldn't understand when I explained I was a teetotaler. 'Not at Christmas, for sure, are you, Nurse?' he asked.

"I had hardly got to bed and warm again when a call came to Tyler Street. 'Please come at once, Nurse, the baby is 'ere bless 'is 'eart, but what she is agoin' to do for clothes for 'im, the Almighty only knows.'

"Nice hearing that, on Christmas Eve, with the bags all at the Vicarage, where they were all, no doubt, sleeping the sleep of the just.

"True enough, when I got to the case, the poor shiftless thing was in her extremity, without so much as a sheet or a blanket, and the baby had to be wrapped in an old dress bodice, a most unaccommodating garment, and the 'lidy from upstairs' invited me to 'manage with the pail as the basin was broke,' volunteering to look for the 'face flannel' meanwhile.

"I had to 'manage' also with 'young Florrie's chemise,' and various articles borrowed from neighbours, to dress the poor little unwelcome atom of humanity in.

"And I won't be the one to see you lie cold, my dear," said the Christ-like 'lidy from upstairs,' 'ere's my plush mantle as you shall 'ave over yer, and I knows as you'll tike care of it, my dear.'

"Then off I set home again through the blinding snow and cutting wind, and that ridiculous policeman stopped me to know where I was 'going at that time of night with a bag,' only to add, 'Oh, beg pardon; didn't recernise you, nurse; Good night, and a Happy Christmas to you.'

"And no more bed for me since," sighs Nurse Jones, as she measures two good spoonfuls into the teapot, "for I had no less than

ten babies to wash this morning!

"I do wish that some of the people who are so bored with Christmas, and eat more than is good for them, could have come my round with me, one comes across a good deal of pathos while one is washing the babies.

"Poor Mrs. Blake, her baby is only four days old, and she had sent her Polly to the shop with her only half-crown, and a horrid boy knocked it out of her hand and made off with it.

"Man proposes and God disposes," she said wearily, 'well, we can't 'ave no Christmas dinner, that's all, 'cos we've only got tuppence left'; and the lidy (from downstairs this time) remarks thoughtfully as she empties some potatoes out of a bowl, in readiness for the baby, 'Don't forget, my dear, as you 'ave to buy a pen'orth of castor oil out of that, but don't take on, my dear, the parson 'ee's a fair old toff, 'ee is, and see if 'ee don't send yer 'somethin' when I tells 'im—not as I ever 'ad a crumb off 'im myself.'

"And 'how I laughed at little Joey next door; he met me with 'Nurse, we got a new biby upstairs, and a new quilt, seven bob! and the biby don't 'alf squall neither, you can fetch it away again if yer like.'

"Really they are at once so funny and so pathetic, one hardly knows whether to laugh or cry."

Nurse Jones continues her reflections for some time with smiles and frowns flitting over her pleasant face, thinking with satisfaction that the 'plush mantle' has been replaced by blankets from the Vicarage, and of the delight which a certain grocer's parcel would occasion in the same quarter. After all, no one but herself would be the loser, by not having that lovely pot of lilies on the table to-morrow. She represses a little sigh, resolutely thanks goodness that she has no time to be lonely, and decides she will go early to bed.

She does so, with the usual result—

In the smallest hours, bang goes the knocker, and Nurse, being but human, mutters "Bother, it is really too bad," dresses herself with many mild imprecations, and is very soon hurrying along the nearly deserted streets, shivering a little, as she tries to keep pace with her taciturn companion. From the distance, Christmas bells and hymns float through the night air. What if they are mingled with the discord of some drunken song of a nightbird. Is it not the same, sweet message that she

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