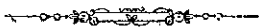


In Three Heads.



THE ARGUS  
CHRISTMAS  
STORY.



BY LEONARD KIP.



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loom, and the whole fabric lie at last revealed in more harmonious aptness of design.

The invitations to the Van Twiller Christmas party were sent out in goodly season. About the middle of September, Gisbort Van Twiller being obliged, for the first time in ten years, to make a journey down the river, bade solemn farewell to all his family and friends, and embarked at Albany upon the little sloop *Mohawk*, commanded by Skipper Derrick Roos. Upon that occasion, Gisbort's maiden sister Mistress Lysbeth—the careful conductor of his household since the lamented decease of his wife Elsie—taking time by the forelock, stuffed his broad-flapped pockets full of ceremonious notes to many of the quality of New York, Brooklyn and Westchester, requesting their presence at the Van Twiller mansion upon the evening of the ensuing Christmas. One of these missives was to His Excellency Lieutenant-Governor DeLancey, then acting Governor of the Colony, others to members of his Privy Council and to officers of the army in garrison at Fort George, near the Bowling Green; and though it was scarcely to be expected that any of these persons could really lend their presence—inasmuch as a winter journey to Albany in that year of grace 1758 was not a thing lightly to be entered upon—yet, as Gisbort Van Twiller was a man of great note in the Colony by reason of his vast landed property, it was felt to be no more than proper that he should give to all existing civic and military dignitaries the compliment of an invitation. These formal notes were accordingly delivered by Gisbort

ten days after sailing, and were courteously acknowledged in as ceremonious manner by the next upward-bound sloop.

In October, Mistress Lysbeth issued a new series of invitations to personal friends and relations along the river. There was a cousin Van Twiller, residing at Claverack, who had married among the Steenwickses; and, of course, the abundant hospitality of the period demanded that both families should be called to the supper. There was a half-uncle Van Twiller, at Coxhackie, in partnership with one of the Osterhouts; and, therefore, of necessity, the Osterhouts must be expected. Then there were Steenwickses and Osterhouts who had intermarried, and whose descendants, settling upon the manor of Livingston, had allied themselves with the Hornebeaks; and, as the Hornebeaks thereby became cousins, they must, on no account, be excluded. In like manner, and for similar reasons, other families were expected from Kats Kills and the region round about Tappaen; and Captain Derrick Roos, duly distributing the invitations as he floated down the river, brought back the answers upon his return trip.

In the early part of November Mistress Lysbeth sent out her invitations to friends and kindred at Kinderhook, Half Moon, Schaatkooke, Schenectady and Rensselaer's Wyck; and in December, summoning her state carriage and two horses, and putting the negro driver, Cato, into his newest livery, she sallied forth and formally distributed a final package of notes among her acquaintances in

Albany itself. This finished that portion of the work. None had been forgotten, excepting three or four families upon the extreme borders of the Colony, who could only be reached by Indian runners, but who, being fourth cousins to the Van Twillers, naturally felt aggrieved at the omission, and cherished a burning hatred ever afterwards. Apart from this, however, everybody of any kinship or distinction in the Colony was invited, and felt satisfied. It was known, far and wide, that the Christmas party was likely to be a great success. The Van Twiller mansion, standing upon the principal street of the city, was large and so arranged as to be capable of entertaining an unusual number of guests. Its reputation for lavish hospitality was established; and it became whispered around that inasmuch as the party was intended to be such a grand affair, it would not begin much before seven, and would probably last until after ten. Therefore there was, naturally, much social excitement upon the subject. Few declined who could manage to come. The towns along the river turned out an unexpected number of acceptances; and though Lieutenant-Governor DeLancey and his Privy Council, all, as had been expected, sent regrets, these were worded with expressions of sad longing that bore the stamp of sincerity. There was now nothing left to Mistress Lysbeth but to count the heads and prepare the banquet.

There was only one bitter drop, indeed, in the cup of Mistress Lysbeth's satisfaction. It arose from the circumstance that the Hillebrandts and their kin

all sent regrets. Most of these lived in Albany itself, and one of the most wealthy families of them close beside the Van Twiller mansion; and, hence, the slight was most keenly felt. But it could scarcely have been expected to happen otherwise, inasmuch as there had been much disapprobation expressed about the matter of young Heybert Hillebrandt. It was openly asserted that though old Gisbort Van Twiller had looked forbiddingly upon Heybert, as any man with such a pretty daughter as Geretie had a right to do, he had not exercised that discretionary power until Heybert had become poor; all friendly countenance having been withdrawn only from the moment when it was discovered that the Hillebrandt title-papers had been lost, and that thereby the squatters could not be driven off. In this assertion the Hillebrandts were more than half right, for Gisbort was, unquestionably, a prudent and calculating father. But there was no doubt that they were scarcely justified in imputing a crabbed and crafty disposition to Mistress Lysbeth, attributing her coincidence in her brother's views more to regard for her social position than for the happiness of her niece; inasmuch as Aunt Lysbeth was not without her many good points, and, in looking out for Geretie's advancement, was doubtless actuated by kindly motives. Nor was it exactly fair to stigmatise Gisbort so harshly for having gone to the Hillebrandt sale and there purchased the old family cabinet. It was said that, after what had passed, he should have stayed away; but, on the other hand, it is difficult to say why, having a

taste for handsome furniture, he, as well as any one else, should not have indulged himself. But be that as it might, the act had given great offense; and, not unlikely, was looked upon as the most crying sin in his career, far outweighing his supposed instrumentality in sending Heybert off to die among the Indians, or his late marked favoritism of young Rollof Van Schoven's pretension to Geretie's hand. Therefore, as in duty bound, the Hillebrandts all sent regrets, resolving never to enter the house where the mahogany cabinet stared them in the face. And having intermarried with the Hogebooms, the Hogebooms also decided not to come. And the Hogebooms being first cousins to the Jansens, the Jansens of course regretted. And the Jansens being about to intermarry with the Van Tienhovens, the Van Tienhovens staid away, and, naturally, persuaded their cousins, the Wyncoopes, to do the same. In fact, one and all took especial umbrage about the mahogany cabinet; whereby it became necessary that their absence should attest their indignation, and a great gulf thereby be left unfilled at the Van Twiller Christmas party.

But, with all this, there was a certain amount of counterbalancing comfort. Young Rollof Van Schoven, the new aspirant for the pretty Geretie, was very wealthy, and, consequently, by his influence, led all his kinsmen with him. His oldest sister had married into the Swartwouts, and they were not more than two degrees removed from the Winegaerts. The Winegaerts were first cousins to the Schenckes, and they, in turn, were connected,

through a half-brother, to the Van Fredingborcks. All these families lived in distant towns, two days' journey off in summer, and seemingly inaccessible at Christmas time. But with due and proper regard to the interest of the Van Schovens, they roused themselves for a joint effort, there being an indistinct half defined, but not the less powerful impression among them, that at the Christmas party the engagement of their young kinsman to Geretie Van Twiller would be announced, and that it was their duty to be on hand at any trouble, to give the affair their countenance and approval. Consequently, from quarters whence only regrets had been anticipated, day after day sloop captains and Indian messengers brought in acceptances, upon receipt of each of which, Aunt Lysbeth's face became suffused with liveliest satisfaction, rejoicing in heart that with the coming of all these wide-spread branches, the absence of the many disaffected families would be less noticeable. Moreover she pleasantly reflected that —

But what it was that Mistress Lysbeth further thought, or how thereupon she acted, it is scarcely worth while now to tell. For the Byvanck letter, though passingly alluding to the matter of the invitations, refrains from all mention of Mistress Lysbeth's further views or preparations, apparently not deeming them essential in carrying out the story of the dream.

## CHAPTER II.

THE Van Twiller mansion stood in the principal street of Albany city, a little above the Dutch Church. It was a stately, double house, having two broad projections upon the street, each ending in a sharp step-shaped gable, crowned with ornamental iron tracery. The date of its erection, 1713, was noted in long iron numerals upon the front; and upon a side gable was perched a curiously fashioned weather-cock, the pride of the city, inasmuch as it was regilded every year.

Leading back from the wooden stoop was a wide hall, dividing the house into two equal parts. One of these was occupied by the state parlor, which was never opened excepting for such choice occasions as a funeral, christening, or the like. Upon the other side was the family sitting-room, of similar size. It had three deep windows and twice as many doors, leading severally into the hall or closets, or other rooms; and all these doors were so much alike that a stranger to the premises, entering heedlessly, might find it not easy to get out again. The room was furnished with stiff, heavy chairs and tables, generally standing close around the wall, and in the middle was a small carpet, reaching only within two or three feet of the edge. At one end was a broad fireplace, calculated for the consumption of great

logs rather than of ordinary sticks, with wondrously stout ornamented andirons upon which to rest them, a tall brass fender in front, and the usual bordering of scripture-illustrating colored tiles. Over the fireplace hung a somewhat worm-eaten and time-stained portrait, not at all improved by successive crude attempts at restoration, and supposed to have once represented Governor Wouter Van Twiller, the ancestor of the Colonial branch of the family.

Upon the evening before the Christmas party, the little family had gathered together in this common sitting-room. No candles had been brought in as yet, but in the deep, wide fireplace a large pile of logs was blazing behind the tall brass fender, sending forth a pleasant glow of brightness over half the room. In front of the mantle-piece stood Gisbort Van Twiller with his back to the fire, daintily toasting the calves of his legs, which being encased in close woolen tights, offered little opposition to the heat. He was in somewhat nervous condition of mind, apparently oppressed with the burden of his thoughts, judging from the manner in which he shifted uneasily from one foot to another, scratched gently a gray patch of hair peeping out from under his carelessly adjusted and still grayer wig, then plunged his hands as deeply into his wide-flapped pockets as the broad cuffs of his coat sleeves would allow, and gazed down, meditatively, upon his shining silver shoe buckles. In fact, Gisbort, being not as easily satisfied as his sister about the approaching party, was reflecting that the success of

a single evening was not to be weighed against the realization of a plan for the happiness of a lifetime; and as it was his desire that Geretie should put an end to all discomfiting tribulations of her heart by accepting young Rollof Van Schoven for her future husband, he had furthermore come to the opinion of all the Van Schovens, that the Christmas gathering should not be brought to an end without being signalized by the pleasing announcement of the projected alliance. To this purpose he had taken every opportunity, of late, to contribute his personal advice and persuasions; and upon this evening, believing that a suitable occasion was again at hand, began once more to press the matter.

"A fine young lad, indeed, Geretie, and I wonder you can be so blind as not to see it."

He spoke in a deep, gruff, impatient tone; but Geretie was not at all deceived by that. She knew that it was not his natural voice, but that he had adopted it, with some difficulty, for purposes of argument, inasmuch as he would not, knowingly, have spoken crossly to her for the world. Therefore she was not frightened into any response. In addition to which, the matter had been so often forced upon her, that she had at last discovered absolute silence to be her wisest policy. In that way her father sooner ran out in his expostulations, and returned to that tone of kindness which, being most natural to him, could not long at any one time be laid aside. Moreover, upon this particular evening, she was very greatly wearied, having been all day laboring at those more delicate preparations for an

entertainment which can never be left to menials, but must be attended to by the head of the house. So, with her eyes half closed by fatigue, and her senses blunted for any kind of contention, she sat, listless and immovable, upon a large sofa, drawn up at an angle to the fire. Beside her, and in the same state of quiet repose, sat her Aunt Lysbeth, an ardent partisan of the projected marriage, indeed, but now as indisposed as Geretie for any argument upon the subject. Therefore it happened that her father had all the talk to himself and endeavored to improve the opportunity.

"Not to speak of five hundred acres of the best flat land in all the Colony—almost a square mile of the largest pine timber—a stone mill upon the Mohawk and a mortgage for 3,000 pounds upon the Provorist farm across the river, and soon to be fore-closed. What better can you look for, Geretie?"

Still, Geretie remained silent. What use in advancing over and over again, the same old answers she had made so often before?

"And next heir to his old Aunt Barbara," continued her father, assuming gruffer accents than ever, as he felt his ability for continued sternness gradually breaking down. "You may think, Geretie, that because she lives in that mean little house across the way, being her heir cannot amount to much, but you are mistaken. She lives there merely because she has become used to it, and does not wish to change. She could buy me out any day. She owns the Podushook property; and they say she has pecks of old Spanish doubloons and chests of family

plate stored away in that musty second-story of hers. And it may be, Geretie, that you also think matters of property should not be allowed a hearing in such an affair as this; but that is because you are so young and foolish. Some day you will know better, perhaps when it is too late to know anything about it at all. A discreet young damsel will always look to these considerations. Your mother did, Geretie. Why, bless my soul! she would never have married me at all if I had not been rich. Not that she did not like me well enough, it may be; but, after all, I was not much to look at, even in the best of times, and therefore, of course, my money always was the most worthy part of me. But she was a sensible girl, and you see how she was rewarded for her caution by a very happy life."

Still not a word from Geretie. She sat gazing steadily at the picture tiles about the fire-place, wondering, possibly, why Jonah was made so little smaller than the whale that was about to swallow him. Meanwhile her father, awaiting force of new inspiration, stooped down and lighted his great carved pipe—an heirloom which he never allowed himself to smoke, excepting when the labors of the day were over—then, passing before her, slowly worked round to the back of the sofa. At that point was a chair, seated upon which Gisbort could face toward the window, and look out while he talked. That, thereby, he was turned away from the other two made little difference, inasmuch as he sat so near that the backs of all their heads almost touched.



"And so, Geretie, you see plainly where your duty as well as your real happiness lies," he continued, blowing out a preparatory cloud of smoke, and, in his growing consciousness of weakness, assuming the deep, gruff tones of a channel pilot. "And, as I have said before, there can be no objection to Rollof Van Schoven for himself, either."

"No, father; only that he is not Heybert Hillebrandt," she responded, worked at last into desperation prompting reply, being resolved to admit nothing in favor of the new lover, wherein comparison might be intended.

"No, not Heybert, of course. How in the world could he be another person, being himself all the while? Besides which you know very well, Geretie, that Heybert Hillebrandt has not been heard of for nearly a year, and must be dead by this time."

"No, father, not dead, or else — or else he would somehow have let me know."

"Let you know? And he a dead man?" exclaimed the old gentleman, rather startled at the illogical assertion. "That is nonsense, you must be aware. But come, Geretie, dry your eyes; I shall not say any more about it now, at any rate."

With that, his voice relapsed into all its accustomed tone of kindness. He had kept up his assumption of paternal severity as long as he could at any one time, and, for a while, the matter must come to an end. And, indeed, he had held out very well, considering that he had not had the benefit of his sister, Mistress Lysbeth's, support. Hitherto she had always come to his assistance, and it was scarcely

the fair thing in her to sit there dozing on the sofa, not helping him with a single word. Therefore, nothing was more plainly to be seen than that, for the moment, the time for importunity and reproof was over. Perhaps he was secretly glad of it, not being cruelly disposed; not the kind who could shut up a daughter in a dark closet, with only bread and water, until she might yield to his wishes. His sole desire was for her happiness, only that his idea was different from hers as to how that happiness might best be promoted. With him there could be no prosperous marriage for a girl, unless pound was weighed against pound, and shilling against shilling; and it was with that conviction that now he pressed Rollof Van Schoven's suit, not wishing to act harshly, and feeling that he was doing all that could be done, if occasionally he threw in a few words of advice and wisdom. It was the continual dropping that he believed might wear away a stone, though he felt vastly dissatisfied that the stone presented such a granite-like texture. Now, however, he had thrown down one more drop; and, with the smoke of his pipe comfortably curling around his old nose and predisposing his nature to quiet, could well afford, for the time, to suspend the vexed controversy. Accordingly he placed his feet cosily upon another chair, and, lazily drawing in the blue smoke, surveyed the scene outside.

First he gazed, meditatively, upon the little single gable house of old Mistress Barbara Van Schoven, directly across the way. There was a light in the second story, and behind the shade the figure of a

moving body. Mistress Barbara, of course; and Gisbort's lively fancy depicted her in the act of poring over her many chests of old silver and her bags of Spanish doubloons, all of which Geretie could so easily obtain if she would only so make up her mind. Then, turning from this subject of contemplation, he made observation of the weather. It was snowing hard, but that should make no difference in the Christmas party. Rather would it promote its success; for there had been much want of snow, lately, and it was well understood that Christmas always lacked half its enjoyment when there happened not to be good sleighing. A goodly depth of snow would make no difference in the coming of the city guests, and many of those who were expected from the country were known to have already arrived. Of others, the snow would facilitate the arrival, provided the wind did not arise to blow up drifts, and provided, also, that the fall was not too heavy. And there was no wind, at present. The flakes fell softly and gently, each in its proper place. Free from disturbance, the snow lay as evenly disposed upon steep roof and picket fence as upon the level ground; no irregularity visible in the horizontal lines of pure whiteness that adorned the step-like gables of each neighbor's house. Then, as to the continuance of the snow—lo! while Gisbort gazed, there came a broken rift in the dark mass of clouds overhead, through which the full moon shot a penetrating gleam, and it became evident that the storm was over. By the next evening the snow would be

trampled down evenly on street and road, making the sleighing all that could be desired. A pleasant smile of satisfaction stole over Gisbort's grim features; his lips relaxed around the mouth-piece of his pipe; the smoke died softly away; his head fell just a trifle further back, and he passed into refreshing slumber.

Upon the large sofa behind him, Aunt Lysbeth had already succumbed to the fatigues of the day, and now slept daintily, with her head poised upon Geretie's shoulder. Geretie herself was still wide awake, constrained thereto by her troubled state of thought, and sat gazing listlessly before her. Past the big log fire, which leaped and crackled upward to the broad chimney, casting out flickering forks of light, making the noses of Jonah and of Noah upon the picture tiles seem very ruddy at times; past the tall carved clock which mendaciously indicated a new moon when it was shining full outside; or gazing into the great hall beyond. A broad wainscoted hall, almost as wide as any of the rooms, and hence furnished almost like one of the parlors. At one side, a broad stairway, with carved mahogany bannisters, ran zigzagging to the upper story; at the other side stood the old carved Hillebrandt cabinet, a heavy, clumsily built piece of furniture with grotesquely sculptured panels and large brass hanging handles to all the drawers, and quaint scutcheons to the doors, and a twenty-ribbed projection at the top, seemingly sufficient for the cornice of a goodly sized house. And opposite the cabinet was the door into the principal parlor, now,

as usual, tightly closed, and not to be thrown open to the public gaze before the morrow evening.

Across from the parlor door and beside the cabinet was another door leading to a range of closets, and thence into the kitchen. The doors at either end of this passage were now open, and Geretie could look through to the end,—not altogether distinctly, indeed, for the evening gloom was upon everything; but in the kitchen were two tallow candles sputtering in their sockets, and by their thus unnaturally increased brightness, Geretie could distinguish much that otherwise would have been hidden. The long table at the side of the kitchen, now heaped up with mince and pumpkin pies as it had never been heaped up before; the piles of ole-locks arranged like cannon balls upon bases of ten or twelve square, built up thence to a single one at top, and giving the table the appearance of a distant arsenal yard; the hundreds of New Year cakes, stamped with the figure of King George, holding a crown and sceptre, and all packed away in close layers like shingles; the kegs of oysters brought up from New York, at great expense, in the boot of the weekly stage, and now arranged beneath the table; the hams hanging from the ceiling, and the legs of venison and dozens of wild ducks and partridges disposed around the walls on hooks—all these and many other preparations for the coming supper were made manifest to Geretie's listless gaze by the forced brilliancy of those two sputtering candles. At one side of the kitchen, and fast asleep in utter exhaustion from the labors

of the day, sat the old negro cook, Chloe, with a long pewter ladle still clasped in her relaxed hand—the unsundered emblem of authority—her big round face disposed so exactly in front of a great white platter, standing on end against the dresser, that its blue border seemed like a saintly aureola around her head. At either side, and crouched upon the floor, and not the least bit in the world asleep or sleepy, were her two coal-black grandchildren, Tak and Rak, engaged in a pleasing game of their own invention. In front of each was a small pile of chestnuts, and the two urchins were tossing to and fro what at first sight seemed to be a black ball. It was not a ball but a hard apple—better to them than any ball, in fact, inasmuch as it would serve all the purposes of one, and moreover was, in its nature, so suggestive of gastronomic joy. Each of these little imps, upon throwing the apple, endeavored to make it bound upon their venerable grandmother's head; whereat, not in the least awaking, she would start up mechanically and rap one or other of her tormentors with her pewter spoon, then fall back again into her olden attitude. And whichever of the two happened to be attacked with the spoon was considered to have lost, and paid a portion of his chestnuts to the other.

For a few moments Geretie watched this pleasant sport. Then the sputtering candle-wicks falling left all in darkness, and put an end to the game. With that Geretie's thoughts were naturally driven in upon herself; and she looked back at the past rather than upon the present, and recalled, for the

thousandth time, the last interview with Heybert Hillebrandt. It was after the ruin of his fortune seemed to have been completed, and her father had discouraged his suit, and Heybert had made up his mind that there was nothing better to be done than to seek his fortune at some other place; for he could not remain in that scene of his olden prosperity and basely delve with spade, while somewhere else there might still be lurking in his favor a happy chance. Even if he donned a hunter's dress, some unexpected favor of fortune might ensue. Therefore he had parted from her secretly and lovingly, and she had vowed to be true to him forevermore. He had placed upon her finger a ring, which she dared not wear openly or even show, but kept locked up in her private desk; though every night, when she had shut herself within her room, she put the ring upon her finger and so went to sleep, very often, in consequence, dreaming of Heybert half the night. And she had given him a ring which he had openly put upon his finger, and vowed that he would take it off only upon one occasion. This would be when he should have succeeded in whatever he might have undertaken; and then he would send the ring back to her, through some trusty friend, as a token that he was coming himself, at last, to claim it and her fair hand as well. But alas! two years had already passed, and the ring had not yet been returned. During the first year she had heard of Heybert as living a trapper's life among the Hurons, at times almost in savage destitution. After that, all track of him seemed to have been lost. It had been said

that he must be dead; could it be really so? But she refused to believe it. With the old illogical faith, it seemed to her that if Heybert had ceased to be, somehow the cruel news would be borne in upon her.

Gradually with the darkness and the monotony of that olden ceaseless round of thought, and perhaps, also, of the slow, measured breathings of her father just behind and her aunt reclining toward her, she fell into a gentle doze herself, and thence into sound sleep. And, sleeping, she dreamed, though not about Heybert Hillebrandt. It might have been expected, indeed, that she would do so. Nothing more natural in theory, than that if one glides off into slumber with a prevailing thought coursing through his brain, the same thought will follow him in dreams, or, at the least, will color such dreams as he may otherwise have. But there is nothing more unusual in fact. Fancy plays strange pranks with our comprehensive powers; and, in the process from wakefulness to sleeping, not merely the person and scene will often suffer unanticipated changes, but the tone of mind as well.

Consequently, though by just right it seemed as though Geretie, falling asleep with Heybert's last words of love in her memory, and his name upon her lips, should have had visions only of him — seeing him as so often hitherto, either as when he had parted from her, or, as he had been pictured, ragged and worn among the Indians — the scene changed suddenly in all its elements. Instead of groves or camp fires there was a tenantless room, in which, for the moment, she stood alone. For a moment only,

indeed, and then there entered, not Heybert, smooth-cheeked and flushed with the wished for success, but a strange, wrinkled, awe-producing old man whom she had never hitherto seen: a tall old man with heavy beard and full shaggy eyebrows, grayer even than the gray locks that hung in somewhat untidy straggling array over his broad white turned down tassel-fastened collar. Clad in a suit of coarse homespun, with something of a military cut about the folded-over sleeves, well adapted, indeed, to the shining steel breast-plate covering his chest, and the clumsy basket-hilted sword that was buckled to his side. This strange old man entering produced, at first, a feeling of terror, so different was he from any one whom she had ever seen before — so peculiarly fixed and unbending was his grim expression. But as he slowly paced the room toward her, though the stolidity and grimness of his features did not alter, it seemed as if there was a not unfriendly look in the quiet gaze he fixed upon her, an expression of personal approval, even, vastly reassuring her. So advancing within a foot of her he stopped, fastened his eyes upon her with the same steady but kindly gaze — seeming to warm into something almost paternal in its gathering softness — then thrust his arm deep within his breast, behind the steel breast-plate.

And this is where earliest we come across the dream; gathering from the Byvanck letter — which, herein, is especially minute in its description of time and place and circumstance — how, for a single moment, the dream came down and fluttered in the bewildered brain of pretty Geretie.

## CHAPTER III.

FOR a moment only. What the old man might have further done, Geretie could not tell; for, at that instant, there came a knock at the front door, and with a start she awoke. The same rap awakened, also, her father and Aunt Lysbeth. Each gave a little start backward, and it naturally happened that, in so doing, the heads of all three thumped together. No damage was done thereby, except that as Gisbort's wig had fallen a little awry during his slumber, leaving a bald spot on his head exposed to the air and Aunt Lysbeth's high metal comb now chanced to strike him exactly upon that place, there resulted to him a somewhat severe contusion. But wisely making no remark, he carefully replaced the wig, and the three awakened sleepers gazed for a moment abstractedly at each other, the mutual thumping of heads having effectually aroused them upon the instant.

"It must be Rollof Van Schoven who knocked," remarked Gisbort, breaking the silence and speaking with a kind of guilty consciousness that he could not altogether disguise. "I told him — that is, he said it was possible he might drop in this evening. It is getting very dark; why does not some one bring candles? And why is not the door opened? It is singular that, with so many servants in the

house, no one is found to answer the door. All asleep, I suppose; though why any one should want to sleep in the day time — Lysbeth, do you get lights, and I will open the door myself, so as not to keep Rollof waiting.”

Mistress Lysbeth hurried to the kitchen to procure a light — a candlestick in each hand — and Gisbort groped his way into the hall. He was only partially at ease, indeed, having a guilty feeling that he had too heedlessly betrayed his participation in the projected visit, and thereby might be brought under filial discipline. True, he had done nothing more than tell Rollof that he could come across upon that evening if so it pleased him, and Rollof had merely said that he would not fail. But much can be implied in very few words; and Gisbort felt that somehow, without half intending it, an understanding of parental consent had lurked behind the invitation, and that Geretie, deciphering the same, would not be slow to manifest resentment. Then he wondered whether Rollof might not be feeling still more discomposed; for, in the opinion of Gisbort Van Twiller, it was not an easy thing to make a formal visit with the intent of offering matrimonial alliance. At least it had not been easy for him, thirty years before, when he had made assault upon the heart of his Elsie; and even then he had been able to bide his time until the way seemed laid open to him at a Pinxter festival. But here was Rollof, coming in cold blood as it were, in fulfillment of a kind of tacit understanding — engaged for the task, however unpropitious might be the circumstances.

At the very thought of it, the perspiration broke out upon Gisbort's face as though he were the victim; and, as he opened the door, he half expected to let in a timid, crouching broken-down figure begging for respite.

He was a little relieved, as well as surprised, to see that Rollof appeared not at all embarrassed. Dressed with such scrupulous care as must, of itself, almost have declared the intent of his coming — in fact, it was Rollof making his toilet, and not the old lady counting her doubloons, whom Gisbort had seen behind the curtain — he stood erect and composed, and even with a tranquil smile upon his lips. Little reason, indeed, could the host but know it, why Rollof should not be at his ease, having his heart so thoroughly fortified with the power of one newly formed purpose.

Following his host into the sitting-room, and reaching it just as Mistress Lysbeth came in from another door, bearing before her two tall lighted candles in still taller candlesticks, Rollof gave hasty glance forward, and saw Geretie arisen from the sofa and making ceremonious courtesy. In her face was no sign or gleam of welcome, however; only a cold, fixed, impassive smile. For, as her father had suspected, Geretie had noticed the accidental admission that Rollof had been invited thither, and thereupon she had at once shut up all her kindly sympathy; in her fancy carrying her thoughts much further than she ought, and wrongly imagining that her hand had been especial subject of mention between the two, and the important interview planned

with deliberate forethought. Therefore she felt that less now, than ever before, would she tolerate it; and sitting down once more, with her face steadily turned toward the blaze of the fire, she relapsed into the silence and immobility of a marble statue.

Rollof sat opposite, and gazing stealthily into her rigid countenance, felt that, had he been now disposed to tempt his fate, he could easily there read his doom, needing not words in explanation of it. A fixed and somewhat melancholy smile came over his own face; and, turning, he gazed around at Gisbort and Mistress Lysbeth. They had taken their places at either side of him, and there sat motionless; each so absorbed in separate train of thought as to forget offering even the customary commonplace greetings of the evening. With Gisbort was the satisfactory conviction that Geretie herself would not now fail to mark the courage and self-possession of Rollof, and so, at last, be favorably impressed by him; with Mistress Lysbeth, on the contrary, was full perception of Geretie's forbidding manner and Rollof's strange, fixed smile, together awakening in her a distracting instinct of something having gone wrong. Such dreadful silence—broken only by a few distinct sounds that did not fill the void, but merely made more noticeable the need of relief elsewhere. The shout of passing boy in the street outside; the snapping of the blazing logs; the measured ticking of the tall clock—neither of these weighed anything against the terrible stillness. So for a moment; and then Rollof himself made bold to break the

silence. And it seemed fortunate, indeed, that he had something worthy to be told and need not deal in commonplaces. An hour before, he had met a scout from the upper regions of the Colony, and the man had given him much information that it might be pleasing for others to hear. Therefore, Rollof, crossing his dainty silk stockings, and hanging his natty little cocked hat over his knee, plunged at once into his subject.

It had so far been a mild winter at the north,—so the scout had told him,—and, consequently, there had been little difficulty in gathering supplies for the garrisons of the outposts. There had been a few skirmishes with small marauding parties of French and Indians, but with little important result. Upon the border, an outlying fortification had been attacked by a large Indian force, but it had been beaten back, with a loss of many killed, and no damage of consequence to the defense. In other directions, also, the Indians had been troublesome, occasionally co-operating with the French in the established war, and again indulging in acts of cruelty and rapine for their own amusement. A family of whites had been slaughtered on the borders of Lake Champlain; and among the Hurons, a white prisoner had been taken, and tortured for two days. Here Geretie, losing for the moment her impassive immobility, looked up with a pale face; and Rollof, still with that sad smile, hastened to add that the victim was an old, worn-out trapper, and by that timely correction gained from her one flickering glance of gratitude. And in every direc-

tion — praise God, for the great mercy — the war against the French was going on well, and with increasing advantage to the English arms. It was even said — but at that hour the report had not been verified — that Cape Breton had already surrendered to the joint attack of General Amherst and Admiral Boscawen. If this were true, it was a great triumph; and with its moral as well as physical effect, might, ere long, lead to the capture of Quebec itself. It was to be hoped that the tidings would soon be verified; and if so, it would make this Christmas a most joyful one to the Colonies of His Britannic Majesty.

Reaching this grand climax of his news, Rollof looked around to mark how his hearers received it; but, to his surprise, observed, that while he had been speaking, his host, who should certainly have been sufficiently interested to wait until the end, had quietly slipped out of the room. And while Rollof wondered at this, Mistress Lysbeth also, affecting to hear a call from old Chloe, arose and made an awkward retreat. The object of this could not now be misunderstood. He had purposely been left alone with Geretie, in order that he might take the opportunity to make his intended avowal. Looking across at Geretie, he could see by the increased fixedness and determination of her expression, that she, also, had well comprehended the enforced situation, and was nerving herself to meet it with all a mortified woman's resentment. That look upon her face was not needed, indeed, to assure him that she was no consenting party to the proceeding; but,

nevertheless, had his intentions been different from what they were, it would have sunk crushingly into his heart, already so heavily laden with warnings of ill success. Possibly he would even have retired without another word, rather than advance to such well-assured discomfiture. But now, on the contrary, he remained; for a moment longer sitting silent, the yell of street boy sounding in his ear like a battle cry, and the monotonous tick of the clock like the thump of sledge-hammer. Then rising with hurried determination, he strode once up and down the room, and pausing, stood before her.

"I hardly know how to say it, Geretie," he began. "I had meant, upon my coming hither, to offer you my hand. Now — well now, I have no longer a thought of it."

Geretie looked up wonderingly at him. Certainly this was singular language. She had made up her mind, of course, that she would listen to no love tales from him; and yet to be thus quietly given to understand —

"Strange talk from me, Geretie, is it not?" he continued. "It is not that I would prefer to have it so, indeed; not but that I would have asked for your love if I thought there was any hope of gaining it. It is simply that something which has come to me to-day has assured me how hopeless it is to think of that. And so —"

As Geretie listened, and, with intuitive perception, gained comprehension of what he was so painfully endeavoring to explain, a bright, cheery smile



broke forth in her face—the cheeriness of relief from long continued apprehension.

“But this is not what my father and Aunt Lysbeth expected you to say to me, is it, Rollof?” she interrupted with a rippling laugh.

“No, Geretie. Nor what my Aunt Barbara expected. Nor what the Swartwouts, and the Winegaerts, and the Fredingborcks expected; who all, somehow, seem to think they have something to say about it. Nor myself, who am more interested than any of them, I believe; and who would gladly have had matters otherwise if I could. But you see, Geretie, it has become easy for me to learn that what I so much desired can never be. And, therefore, I have asked myself what was best to do? Should I struggle in vain, and make my coming always an annoyance to you, and stand in your presence a baffled, disconsolate lover? Or should I pluck up a brave heart, resign my hopes, and try in some other way to remain your friend?”

“Pluck up the brave heart, Rollof,” she answered, the pleasantest smile she had known for weeks now beaming upon her face. It was so comforting to her soul to know that the ordeal she had so long dreaded had thus sensibly passed over, and that she had gained a friend instead of lost an admirer. “And now sit down beside me, Rollof, and tell me further what all this means.”

So he sat down upon the sofa with his back to the window, through which, at that very moment, his Aunt Barbara was ineffectually endeavoring to peer across from the seclusion of her parlor opposite.

She had noted the direction of his going out, and was now anxiously looking for further developments. To her, also, had come the comfortable conviction that this was the important evening; and it was hard for her to convince herself that, with clear eye-sight so very necessary, she could not see distinctly through her spectacles and two small-paned windows and across a wide street. In vain she sighed and alternately wiped her spectacles and window panes; she felt, at last, that, for any definite information, she must patiently await Rollof's return. Gisbort here—Aunt Barbara there—other Van Schovens and their collaterals, everywhere—all eagerly anticipating tidings of the projected alliance; and here was Rollof, in utter disregard of their wishes, and as though he were the only party concerned, quietly baffling their expectations. For he told Geretie how that, for a long time, he had realized the vanity of his hopes, and many times already had been inclined to abandon the struggle; and how that, taking sober counsel with himself, he had at last resolved to act the manly part, giving her the acceptable Christmas offering of freedom from future persecution on his behalf, and asking in return the most precious gift of her sisterly friendship. Little by little, as he proceeded, Rollof felt his utterance, as well as manner of explanation, more easy—perhaps having actually been less interested in the affair than he had previously imagined—and, in the end, Geretie and he became quite composed, and even inclined to look upon the matter with something of philosophic spirit.

"But you said, Rollof, that your determination about — about the hopelessness of all this, you know, came partly from something you have heard to-day. Was it about Heybert? It may not seem quite right for me to talk about him; and yet there can be no use concealing from you, at least, an interest that everybody else seems to understand. Yes, there is really something about him in your mind," she continued, with sudden impulse of a quickened instinct; "something that perhaps you would like to tell me, and yet feel that you should withhold! What is it, Rollof? And why, if you must not speak, have you said so much already? Tell me everything now; that only is the part of a true friend."

"It is not much, Geretie," he answered, after a moment's pause, not wishing to excite false hope; yet feeling that since, with woman's quickness, she had divined so much, it might do no harm to brighten her life a little with anticipation of good that might possibly happen. "Not much, indeed, only that to-day, from the scout, I heard something; though, after all, I had better not now tell you what it was, for it may turn out untrue. If it is true, it is good news — so much I can venture to say; but, if false, then it will be as you have hinted, that I had better have told you nothing at all, and have left you in ignorance from the very first. Trust me, Geretie, for now acting as seems most wise. If you would know something of what I mean, I will tell you to remember that courage and perseverance some times find a position in which to

reap their reward, and therefore — But wait, again I say; for, after all, it may be false report."

"I will wait as you direct!" Geretie exclaimed, "for I know that when the proper time arrives, you will tell me all. But even now I will not believe that any part of it is not true. I have waited too long already, that fate should not prove kind to me at last. You need tell me nothing more, Rollof, for I can feel it all. It means that Heybert is indeed coming back to me! That all I have endured and suffered is to pass away forever — to be no more remembered, except it may be as we recall a frightful dream!"

The time-eaten portrait of old Governor Van Twiller shook a little to and fro as she spoke; but that was only the wind, nor could it matter how the dead might think or act. It was the living Van Twillers who were concerned; and, if Gisbort could have listened to the late conversation, how would he have shaken with disgust and anger of Rollof, at having thrown away an opportunity so carefully prepared for him. But Gisbort was far out of hearing, standing upon his front stoop ankle deep in snow. He had gone thither inconsiderately, in his transparent pretense of household business elsewhere; the door had blown to behind him, and he was now afraid to demand readmission lest his knock might be mistaken for that of new visitors, and thereby endanger the continuance of the all-important interview. He would wait outside, therefore, and endure the cold and snow until Rollof might appear to receive his congratulations and con-

sent, and, if need be, his blessing. But Mistress Lysbeth, with better self-possession, had employed her time skirmishing to and fro between hall and kitchen; now rousing up Chloe to impossible tasks, then looking into closets for articles that she knew to be elsewhere, again returning to the hall and taking furtive peeps into the sitting-room. Now, seeing that Rollof and Geretie were sitting close together upon the sofa, smiling pleasantly upon each other, she could not fail to feel assured that her late discouragement had proved ill founded, and that true love had gained, at last, its successful termination. This happy conviction now irradiated all her features, destroyed her customary equipoise, and made her garrulous with exuberance of delight.

"Why talk about dreams? And what frightful dream have you ever had, Geretie?" she said, coming in with a little warning cough, and indistinctly catching the last few words. "Never trouble yourself about such vain things as dreams, Geretie, for they mean nothing. Do I not know, myself? The pleasantest dreams one can have—about flowers and fairies, it may be—will often come before a death; and many a time I have dreamed frightful things, and had them followed by good news.—Even as now, indeed," she continued, wagging her head archly, and with much significance of meaning, "for who would have thought that good things were about to happen, when, so little while ago, I dreamed about a horrid rough old man?"

"An old man, Aunt Lysbeth?"

"Yes; not an hour ago, when your father so

rudely waked me up by knocking his head against mine,—sending my comb, I verily believe, almost half an inch into my brain. A queer old man it was that came to me, frightening me almost to death with his terrible eyebrows and his great tangled beard. It almost seems as though I saw him yet. He had an iron breast-plate in front of him, and wore a clumsy old sword with hilt as large as one's two fists. I remember thinking, at the time, that it was a strange costume to wear in the presence of a lady; though, doubtless," —

"Tell me, aunt," cried Geretie, becoming suddenly interested, "did this old man walk into the room, and come close to you, and put his hand into his bosom behind the breast-plate, and" —

"No, he did nothing of the kind, Geretie. He did not come into the room—whatever room it was—for I found him there already; and so I suppose he came there first. And he had his hand behind his breast-plate when I first saw him. But, as I looked, he pulled it out, and there was something like a roll of parchment in his hand, and" —

"And what then, Aunt Lysbeth?"

"Why then your father thumped me, and I woke up; but, for the moment after, I was quite frightened, thinking that I saw the cross old man still standing before me.—And therefore, Geretie," she continued, again wagging her head with arch meaning, "do not trouble yourself about your dreams, even if they are frightful; seeing that, as in my case, they may all the same be followed by something just as pleasant the other way."

And so it was that, in due sequence, the dream came also to Mistress Lysbeth. The knowledge of which fact, however, might never have transpired, but for this visit of Rollof Van Schoven; inasmuch as — according to the Byvanck letter — Mistress Lysbeth was always so wrapped up in matters of household economy and care, that it was more than likely that, at the very next hour, she would have forgotten all about the dream.



## CHAPTER JY.

**B**UT Geretie, however startled at the time, gave the matter little thought, when, somewhat later, she retired for the night. What though two persons had dreamed about one and the same queer, cross old man? Was not this a matter of mere chance coincidence that could not fail to happen often, did we but know it? Nay, the very departure from absolute similarity in the dreams was a mark of imperfection; while, surely, nothing whatsoever seemed likely to come of it. Therefore, dismissing the matter from her mind, she put on her ring, and surrendered herself to the influence of brighter visions — dreaming, as so often before, of Heybert. How that, as had been so pleasantly hinted to her, his trials all were over, and how that he must already be coming back. Mingling him, in her fancies, with much that was unreal and grotesque indeed; as when the painted tiles about the fireplace obtruding themselves, she dreamed that he was coming back in the guise of the prodigal son, bringing his own fatted calf with him to insure his welcome; and that, thereupon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came forth to meet him, singing joyful congratulatory anthems. But, throughout all, there was the one real perception that Heybert must be coming back.

The song of the three fire-tried youths still sounded in her ears when she awoke. But little by little it resolved itself into anything else than ancient canticle, and intoned by any other than Babylonian voices; for, as her perceptions grew more collected, she recognized the well-attuned notes of a choir of little negroes, singing a Christmas anthem from door to door. Thus cheerily reminded of the day, Geretie sprang from her bed and hurried to the door, outside of which hung her stocking; for she was not yet so far advanced in years as to have grown out of her childish pleasure in exploring the Christmas stocking, and developing its delightful mysteries. Then springing back into bed with the laden treasure, excitedly she drew forth one and another closely folded paper, laying them in line upon the coverlet before her. The pin-cushion, so long being made by old Chloe, and so often hidden hastily beneath a saucepan when Geretie had chanced to enter the kitchen; the gold chain and locket from Aunt Lysbeth; the ten commandments carved by Rak and Tak upon two conch shells, and the fox-skin purse from Cato; the promised gold watch from her father—all these at last lay spread out before her. Nothing so small as to be despised, so faithful and warm-hearted was its giver,—everything welcomed with almost equal delight, for the true affection that had prompted its bestowal. With her hands thrown upon the pillow behind her, and supporting her head, Geretie lay back for a moment or two, and tried adequately to realize how happy she ought to be, surrounded by this wealth of sweet

regard. And how supremely blissful would she now be, if she could only hear from Heybert! Was Heybert where he, too, could hang out his Christmas stocking? Was he where he could boast any stocking to put out at all? She smiled to herself as she pictured him among the Hurons, hanging outside his wigwam a beaded moccasin as the best substitute for a stocking, to find in it the next morning, perchance, a scalp-bracelet or bear's-tooth necklace; enjoying her fancy the more heartily as she felt assured that it had no basis of cruel fact. For had not Rollof talked about preferment having come to Heybert, and predicted his return? This was the cheery idea that now underlined her whole tone of thought.

Newer sounds now arising from the street below, Geretie arose, gently drew her curtain and looked out. A bright sun was shining; the promise of the previous evening having been fulfilled in a clear, sparkling day. As her father had surmised, the snow had fallen gently and unobtrusively, making little chance of obstruction through drifts. It lay on roadway and fence and gable with uniform depth, so evenly fallen that it seemed as though fairy hands must have followed each flake in its quiet descent, and fastened it securely in place. How otherwise, indeed, could it be that the thick covering lay so motionless upon the steep roofs of the little church below, and upon the sharp gables of Aunt Barbara's house opposite? How otherwise could the flakes cling so firmly upon the insecure resting-place of the

iron numerals upon the front, marking out the date in such clear bright lines?

In the middle of the street stood a row of market wagons from the country with beef and poultry. The owners haggled over their sales as usual; and yet it seemed as though their discussions were more good natured than at any other time, so genial was the influence of the day. Down the street from the fort two officers, tucked up in bear skins, drove along in their open sleigh; and, as they passed the Van Twiller mansion, a little negro took courage and threw a snowball at them. Thereupon it might be supposed that these insulted sons of Mars would descend, draw their glittering blades, run the offender through the body, wipe their reeking weapons upon the bear skin robes, and drive off with pleasant sense of vengeance satisfied. Instead, thereof, they arrested the sleigh for only a moment; and one of them reaching over gathered up a hard snowball, with which, taking correct aim, he hit the aggressor so plumply in the center of the stomach as to knock him over. Then they rode on again laughing, the very bells upon the horses seeming to turn their silver tinkle into a "Merry Christmas;" and the little negro rising unharmed and appearing rather gratified at the encounter, laughed in turn even still more hilariously. So did the pleasant inspiration of the Christmas morning brighten up every heart with charity.

At the door of the opposite house suddenly appeared a curiously enveloped figure, with not less curious head-dress. It was old Aunt Barbara. Be-

fore her stood a servant with empty basket; and now Aunt Barbara carefully piled the basket with pies and cakes, and in each corner a chicken—all destined for poor pensioners—and at last sent off the servant with minute and often repeated directions. Just then the choir of little negroes came down the street on their return, and, seeing her, formed in front of the house and sang their carol. Upon this Aunt Barbara retired into the house; and an unreflecting stranger might have supposed that she had peevishly gone away to avoid the singers. But not so; for, in a moment, she returned and distributed among them plenteous reward of cakes, which they proceeded at once to demolish, postponing, with the usual improvidence of their race, all further minstrelsy until new cravings of the stomach might call them to resume their labors. So, everywhere, beaming smiles and hearty good wishes were interchanged—even the spirit of trade having kindly charities mingled with it in correction of its customary acerbities—old age becoming, for the moment, young again, and dignity condescending to lively frolic. And all the while, the little bell upon the English church, away up the hill, rang out a joyful salutation to the day, with as merry spirit and consequential self-sufficiency as though it were a whole chime of bells.

Then Geretie, leaving the window and making her toilet, gently opened the door, with intent to slip softly down stairs on tip-toe, and steal a march upon her father and aunt, with the first greeting for the day. Not so easy, indeed, for she also had been

waylaid with like intent. Beside her door crouched old Chloe, and on the first step stood Cato, and clinging to the bannisters were Rak and Tak. All these, as she appeared, screamed forth in one chorus a merry Christmas to her; holding up, in joyous acknowledgment of them, the little gifts she had put into their stockings. At the sound of this uproar, of course her father and Aunt Lysbeth darted out from below and caught her, unaware, upon the very last step—her father pinching her lovingly upon the cheek, and her aunt, with mistaken aim, kissing her in the middle of her chin.

Which being done, her father remembered how that he had just been told by Aunt Lysbeth about the undesirable working of matters the previous evening. How or why it had so happened he did not know; it was sufficient that hope for the Van Schoven alliance seemed at an end, and that he had caught a cold while waiting, to no purpose, outside in the snow. It seemed his duty to scold a little; and with that intent he proceeded to make himself as red in the face as possible, roughening his throat a little for a harsh, grating roar. But Geretie, perceiving his intent, kissed him so accurately upon the very center of his mouth, that she broke up all these preparations.

"Not to-day, father," she said. "Not upon Christmas morning, when all should be so happy and well pleased with each other, you know. And when, moreover, we have so much to do, that we have no time to be cross."

"No, Geretie, not to-day, of course," he responded,

breaking into a hearty smile. "Not when we have so much to do, indeed."

Which meant that, for him, there was nothing to do except to smoke his big carved pipe from immediately after breakfast to early dark, occasionally gossiping with a passing neighbor. But for Geretie, there was everything to be attended to, so that it seemed wonderful how one person could get through so much. There were visits to be made in different directions; visits of ceremony upon relatives, who would, on no account, think of Christmas passing by without her coming; and visits of friendly charity upon old dames who always looked forward to her approach as synonymous with the mince pies and krullers that she brought. There was a short service to be attended in the little Dutch church at the bottom of the hill, and there was the English church at the other end of the street, to be looked into; since it was always considered one of the most important observances of the season to note how tastefully the chancel and pillars were wreathed with pine and hemlock. All these formed only a portion of Geretie's duties for the day.

For, coming home, there was the state-parlor to be opened and dusted out as only its mistress could dust it. There was the little square carpet in the center to be taken away to make space for the dancing. There was almost all the lower floor of the house to be waxed under Geretie's eye. There were sconces for candles to be placed along the walls, and the parlor chandelier to be fitted with wax lights and decorated with Christmas greens.

There was old china to be ferreted out from the dark closet depths and arranged for use. There were quaint pieces of silver, blackened from want of use, and seemingly almost forgotten, to be taken out of their green baize coverings and polished up. And there was the great bowlful of punch to be concocted after her grandfather's receipt, and then carefully locked up, lest the cook and coachman might be tempted to try its strength, and, trying it too often, overcome their own.

Lastly, and late in the afternoon, there was to be a retirement of Aunt Lysbeth and Geretie to their respective apartments; to be speedily followed thither by sundry women well skilled in secrets of the toilet. Of this, the result became apparent a little before seven; for, at that time, the door of one room opening, let out Aunt Lysbeth, gorgeous with stiff brocade and gold-threaded turban, and with ample gold chains looped around her neck. Then from the other room speedily appeared Geretie, in dress of less cumbrous material, but with her heavy masses of auburn hair wonderfully built up over a high cushion, so as to show the whole pretty face up to the very roots of the hair, making also more evident the lustrous pearls forming her ear-rings. Her father was already down stairs and awaiting them; somewhat uncomfortable, perhaps, in his new wig and his tights, which he suspected had been made a trifle too tight. To console himself, he was trying to whistle the little negro boys' Christmas anthem, thinking that it was God save the King. But at sight of the new comers he forgot wig and

tights and Christmas song; and, hobbling forward, paid to his sister the expected compliments upon her appearance, while he embraced Geretie with abundant effusion of parental love.

"But take care, father, or you will pull down my hair," was Geretie's response, as she released herself. "And more than all, you will bruise your pretty Christmas present, which, as you see, I am wearing at my belt."

"A trumpery little watch—not half what a Christmas present should be," he muttered ruefully. "Do you know, Geretie, I had meant another kind of Christmas present for you—a rich young husband?"

"That is a present one should always select for herself, father."

"No doubt you think so, Geretie," he responded, feebly attempting a growl. "And therefore it is that so foolishly you have given up everything—the mill upon the Mohawk, and all! Not to speak of what I have learned this morning—that his old Aunt Barbara has begun to fail and cannot last six months! A young man about whom half the marriageable girls in the city are dreaming, while you persist in dreaming only about a penniless adventurer, roving around among the Indians, if he has not already been knocked upon the head by some of them. And what is more, Geretie, talking so much about him, as you do, that even I begin to dream of him; or rather, which is not quite as disreputable, of his old great grandfather."



"And how, father, did you know his great grandfather?"

"Did I say I knew him, you vixen? How, indeed, could I know a man who was one of Governor Stuyvesant's councilors and lived nearly a century ago? But for all dreaming purposes, I suppose it is the same thing to know old Cornelis Hillebrandt's portrait. It hangs in the parlor of Andries Hillebrandt, Geretie, who is the present head of the family, and if Heybert never comes back, will inherit the nothing he leaves behind him. Quite an interesting old portrait, indeed, seeing that old Cornelis is shown up in steel breast-plate and basket-hilted sword, as befits a brave warrior who in the old country served two campaigns with Prince Maurice, and generally looks grim and warlike too" —

"And you dreamed about him, did you say?" cried Geretie, starting. "And when was that?"

"Last night, I believe. No, not last night, after all; but yesterday evening, as we all sat nodding together, just before the lights were brought in."

"And did he seem to come into the room where you were, father? And did he put his hand into his breast and pull out a parchment roll?"

"He did nothing of the sort, Geretie. He was in the room when I came in, if I ever came in at all. All I know is that I found myself standing in front of him, and might have been born there, for anything I can tell to the contrary. And if he had put his hands into his breast after a parchment, he must have done so before I came; for when I saw him, he was flourishing the roll in the air, and he said" —

"What did he say father?" Geretie almost breathlessly inquired.

"Now, that is what I do not remember," Gisbort answered. "It could not have been anything very particular, or, I suppose, I should have laid it more to heart. And then, again, you know, I am not very much in the mood to hold communication with the Hillebrandts, either alive or dead. Anyhow, before I could fix the matter, whatever it was, in my recollection, your Aunt Lysbeth awoke me; very inconsiderately knocking her comb half through my bare skull, and leaving a dent in which I can almost lay my finger."

Geretie pondered the matter; a little confused at first, but light gradually breaking in upon her, as she began to put facts together and form something of a collected theory out of the whole affair. Might it not have been that old Cornelis Hillebrandt had visited her in a dream, to tell something important about her lover; that the dream had come to her ill-timed and at the moment of her awakening; and that, in the sudden knocking together of heads, it had been driven in detached portions from one to the other, her father holding that last fragment which, with the first and second, should have come to herself alone?

"Father," she cried, seizing him by the arm, "you must remember and tell me all that the Councilor Cornelis Hillebrandt told you. I am sure that it must have been something about Heybert. Think — think all you can about it, father, and let me know. It was not your dream at all, or even Aunt Lysbeth's,

but mine; and you must not keep any portion of it. The dream was all my own, and Aunt Lysbeth knocking her head against mine, stole away a part of what belonged to me. Then you thumped Aunt Lysbeth and took away another and the best part of the dream from her. And, therefore, do you not see, father, that" —

"Why, what does the girl mean?" cried Gisbort, in natural astonishment. "Your dream, indeed! Have you so taken possession of the whole Hillebrandt family, that while you dream about Heybert you will not allow me a moment with his grim old great grandfather? There, run away Geretie, and think no more about such foolishness."

Whereby it will be seen that Gisbort, discovering himself to be the acknowledged complement of the charmed circle of the dream, was disposed to treat the matter with somewhat careless spirit; though, — as the Byvanek letter intimates, — it was not improbable that, secretly, he was a little discomposed about the meaning and effect of the dream's singular partition and sequence of delivery.

## CHAPTER V.

BEFORE Geretie could make any response, the knocker of the outer door, announcing the first arrival, compelled her to hurry across the room, and take her allotted position for reception. Old Cato, the coachman, now on duty as door-keeper, startled by that first rap from a comfortable nook in the kitchen, shuffled hastily toward the front, putting on a new liveried coat as he went; and with that early arrival, almost at one instant, the great tide of the invited began to flow in steady stream. A lively scene out doors, where, from every point of the compass, the guests converged to the Van Twiller mansion as though by preconcerted signal. Young damsels, tripping along blithely, with thoughts all fixed upon the festivity before them; finely gotten-up old gentlemen pacing solemnly onward, in the importance of new laced and ruffled suits; maternal dames in brocade, picking their way through the middle of the street, lest chance falls of snow from the roofs might discompose their laboriously erected head-dresses; officers in red coats and braided gold clink-clanking, down from the fort; not least of all to be mentioned, old Barbara Van Schoven, tottering over from her house, wrapped up as closely as though she were starting out for the Canadas, and reaching the further side of the street in state of great exhaus-

tion — so they came in gathering crowds. Most all were on foot, for the city was not so widely extended that many guests must ride. But now and then would draw up some large covered sleigh, with two or four horses, according as the dignity of the owners or the distance they had traveled demanded; and from the dark recesses of these vehicles emerged wealthy citizens from the neighborhood or Patroons from across and down the river, from Rensselaer, Livingston, and even from as far as Courtland manor; or scarcely less powerful landholders from along the Mohawk and down the Hudson; almost every broad possession, as far south as Philip's Patent, sending its representatives. To lighten these guests in their descent was the especial duty of Rak and Tak, now newly clothed in liveries of black, turned up in the cuffs and collars with red, and who each bore a flaming torch, to the intense admiration of other little negroes gathered around; which torches being held up at each side of the great sleighs, often made goodly chance exhibition of rich laces and velvets, gold shoe-buckles, and other, festive adornments upon those descending, and called forth cheers from all the crowd.

In doors, a scene still more animated and resplendent, as now the rooms began to fill, and every moment the throng increased, until at last both parlors and the broad hall seemed closely occupied. A brilliant array of stiff-figured brocades and embroidered satin vests — of sweeping trains and colored silk tights — of high-heeled rosetted slippers and silver buckled shoes — of artistically fashioned head-dresses and

carefully powdered wigs. Here and there the military uniform of officers from the fort or the official costume of Councilor of State, giving pleasant variety to the scene. An animated throng, which soon resolved itself into its proper groups and positions; a few old gentlemen immovably stationing themselves before the fire and beneath the picture of old Governor Van Twiller; there interchanging snuff and talking about the war with the French; old ladies sitting in corners and silently criticising each other's laces and jewels — heir-looms, brought out long ago from London or Amsterdam, as the case might be; the most decorously disposed damsels arranging themselves along the sides, and there awaiting invitations to the coming dance; but the greater portion of the guests filling up the spaces between and loitering in slow moving tide from room to room, until it seemed as though all the expected guests must be already there. Which was the fact, — excepting, indeed, that two and the most desirable elements of the company yet lingered; and as Mistress Lysbeth passed around, bestowing here and there her greetings, she watched the door in anxious expectation of those still absent ones.

Having not long to wait, however, since very soon they came; — the minister of the English church, upon the hill, and the dominie of the Dutch church, at the cross-streets below, entering arm in arm, as befitted men whose Churches were in such pleasant and friendly unity. As sacerdotal guests, they were, of course, not bound down to any worldly follies of costume, — eschewing velvets and maintaining rather

their accustomed broadcloth, and having their well-shapen legs attired in tights of plain black worsted, rather than of lustrous colored silks. And yet, for all that, there was something of scrupulous care to be detected in the accurate powdering of their white wigs, and in the dainty starching of the thin strips of plain lace peeping from their coat-fronts. Making their most dutiful compliments to the smiling hostesses, the pastors proceeded onward with cheerful sobriety of mien, distributing plenteous greetings to the many surrounding members of their several flocks; which being done, they accepted chairs of honor from which, themselves not dancing, they might watch the course of those who did, in the pleasant meandering through graceful waltz and stately minuet. Now, surely, the company must be all complete.

Not yet; for suddenly a large stage-sleigh, drawn by six horses for easier conflict with the up-country snow-drifts, stopped in front of the Van Twiller mansion, and a head and shoulders in military cocked hat and cloak being projected, inquiry was made as to the nearest crossing at the river. With him were eight other officers of the British army — the speaker explained — all participants in the late capture of Cape Breton, and now on their way with the glorious news to New York. Hearing this, Gishort Van Twiller hurried out bare-headed and supplicated them to alight, and for that evening, at least, partake of his poor hospitality; alleging that he would never forgive himself if he suffered so many brave soldiers of His Majesty, King George, to pass

his house, unrefreshed. To which entreaties after a little persuasion, the officers acceded; and when they entered and threw off their cloaks, they appeared attired in such spotless yellow leather tights, such becoming and well-fitting red coats, and such carefully powdered locks, as made it more than lightly suspected that they had refitted themselves at the fort above in anticipation of a welcome, and that the inquiry as to the nearest river point was a mere pardonable subterfuge. However this might be, none the less was their reception hearty, and the favor shown them for their late gallantry most abundant. And at once did common consent unite to reward them with the prettiest partners for the coming dance; to which none showed themselves disinclined, excepting two or three, who, alleging recent incapacitating wounds, remained apart as mere spectators. And now, at last, the party must really be complete.

Not yet, indeed; for scarcely had those brave officers been welcomed, than from the head of the street, and simply coming on foot, appeared His Excellency, the acting Governor De Lancey. He had been unexpectedly summoned, during the past month, to the northern portion of the colony, on public business; which, having been completed, it was no difficult task so to arrange his homeward route as, after all, to enter the Van Twiller mansion, upon that Christmas evening. With his lavender tights and richly-chased silver shoe-buckles, his embroidered velvet coat and fine lace cuffs, and bosom plaits, his long buff vest and shapely peruke, the Lieutenant-Governor was a stately and pleasant sight to see.

Upon either side of him walked a member of his council, the companions of his journey, similarly arrayed, though with somewhat less degree of elegance, by way of showing all proper deference to rank; and behind, as his military body guard, were two full-uniformed officers of the British regiment in garrison near the Bowling Green. Attended by these four satellites, the Lieutenant-Governor made stately progress through the apartments; giving pleasant greetings here and there to well-remembered friends, neglecting no opportunity of complimenting matronly dignity or blushing beauty, and even bestowing most gracious and deferential smiles upon his haughty political rival of Livingston manor. And now, beyond a doubt, was the party all made up at last.

Little need, it may be, to tell at greater length than by mere suggestion, how, at the first, the ball was opened with single ceremonious minuet, wherein the Lieutenant-Governor gallantly leading out Mistress Lysbeth Van Twiller for his partner, headed the dance, while other dignitaries, with other dames of high degree, filled out the set. How slow and stately was the dance, performed to becomingly heavy music, with only here and there a quickened step, and mostly carried through with dignified balancing to the right and left, and with low and gracious bowing every minute to each other person's partner, the whole concluding with bows still lower and more stately than any that had gone before. And how, after this opening dance was ended, even those who had most attentively enjoyed it, drew deep sighs of relief, and searched out partners for them-

selves; whereupon, not one, but several sets were formed in parlors and hall, and the music fell into livelier strains, and form and ceremony were somewhat cast aside, and mirth and joviality began to take their place.

Or how, when, at last, the moment for supper arrived, the guests all crowded into the largest room, and there did full justice to the ample display. How, more especially, the men, both old and young, did honor to the great punch bowl, which, within the hour, was many times emptied and refilled. How, for all that, our ancestor's heads being made of strong and resisting material, there was no marked excess, each one coming away as soberly as he had approached; though it was cautiously whispered around that two or three of the old gentlemen, who had tapped their snuff-boxes beneath the portrait of Governor Van Twiller, went home with the queues of their periwigs a little askew. And how, that a lighter wine was furnished for the dames and damsels, who partook thereof with much affected reluctance and timid smile and blushes; but being at last persuaded, grew brighter in the eyes, and afterward danced all the better therefor.

These things need not be told, being so easily imagined. It is sufficient, indeed, to narrate the incident that made pretty Geretie's eyes grow bright and a roseate blush of happy anticipation suffuse her face. She had not danced every time, preferring to leave that pastime mostly to her guests, herself gliding from one to the other in pleasant greeting. Now, during a pause in the figure, and while for the

moment standing alone near one of the heavily curtained windows, her hand resting lightly against her side, she felt a little three-cornered piece of paper gently slipped between her fingers. To cast it away, as an uncalled for attempt to hold secret correspondence with her, was of course her duty; but at the first moment, there was the instinct of crushing the paper in her hand, to learn its nature. And doing so, she felt that there was a ring inside.

With that, her heart gave a joyful bound. It needed not that she should open the paper to learn whose ring it held. There was only one ring that could ever come to her in this manner—her own little torquoise ring, which she had given to Heybert Hillebrandt, and which was to be returned to her only as a token that all had gone well, and that he was coming back, at last, to claim her. No wonder that the flush of assured hope mantled her face, and that her eyes shone brightly with the intensity of newly found happiness! Gently, and with almost imperceptible sliding of her hand, she dropped the precious paper into her pocket,—turning, as soon as she could do so safely, to see who was the giver. But there was now no guest standing very near her—no one, except her father, who, catching her bright glance, could not refrain from commenting upon it.

"No prettier damsel in all the room than my own Geretie," he whispered, with bluff heartiness of satisfaction. "If you would alway look as happy"—

"Father," she whispered in return, sidling up closer to him, "I am happy, because there is something that has made me so. No matter what it is,

now. But I think that you can make me still more happy, if you will only recollect what old Cornelis Hillebrandt said to you. For it is not your dream; it is mine. He came to tell me what has become of Heybert; he would never have told you, because you do not like Heybert, and would not care to know. And his face never would have relaxed from its sternness and looked kindly into your face as it did into mine. Men do not look at each other in that way, indeed. It was my dream; and you and Aunt Lysbeth have got it away from me by a mistake. If all our three heads at that moment had not—Now think hard, father, and let me know."

Old Gisbort, as she spoke, turned his face from her, reflectively, or rather with the air of one who tries to reflect, and, under the circumstances, finds it difficult to do so. There was so much noise around;—who, indeed, could think of anything? He looked first down at his shoe-buckles, finding no inspiration there. Then into the middle of the room where were two sets of dancers, through into the sitting-room where were other two sets, out into the hall where was still another set. All seemingly in vain; for how could any one reflect with that pattering of feet keeping time in every direction, that lively tune ringing in his ears? Such a very lively tune, indeed, kept back by the black fiddlers exclusively for this after-supper hour! Those who danced seemed to do so with more life than ever before; those who were not in the sets could not refrain from beating time with their feet, or with responsive nod of head. Gisbort himself began to rock his wig this side and

that in unison with the measure, and was evidently forgetting all about Geretie's question, when she took him by the arm, and brought him back to the subject.

"The dream, father — the dream. What did old Cornelis Hillebrandt say? It has been so heavy on my mind all day; but I would not trouble you then, for you wanted that I should not be idle. But now" —

"Yes — yes, Geretie, the dream," he responded. "I will really try to think. He said — it was something — what was it indeed?"

Strange, perhaps, that her father should have submitted to her questioning with such easy acquiescence in its propriety — strange, perhaps, that he did not laugh at her, and treat her demand as the outcropping of mere exuberant fancy. In the morning he would certainly have done so. But it happened that within the past hour he had drank freely of his punch, — constrained thereto, by his duty as host, it being incumbent upon him, personally, to pledge many civil and military dignitaries, from the Lieutenant-Governor downward. He was not at all disordered thereby, the hard brain of that period never yielding to the hospitable labor of a mere hour or two. But still he was thrown into a pleasant glow of self-content, and into that impressive mood of mind wherein many things seem very natural that at other times might be considered strange. He could not have carried his fancy so far as to have imagined the presence of ghosts or spirits; but it was not so difficult to accept, as truth, the promul-

gation of a novel philosophical theory. It therefore happened that, with the earnestness of Geretie's pleadings, it seemed no more than rational that one person should, by mistake or mismanagement, have come into possession of another person's dream.

"Yes, I will try to recollect, Geretie; — as well, that is, as that capering tune will let me," he said.

Once more he endeavored to contract his brow with thought; then again gazed across the scene of nodding wigs and plumes and dancing feet, into the hall. There, too, all heads were moving in symphony with that cheery measure. Even the negroes in the kitchen had been attracted thereby, and slowly, but not the less surely, had edged their way inch by inch through the line of intervening pantries, until they stood in the hall itself. Slaves of the household and slaves of other houses — some in the decent dignity of their masters' cast-off suits, and some in their own fresh liveries — some there as invited guests of the kitchen, and some there officially, as pages, or footmen, awaiting their masters' departure; little by little they had stolen into the hall, and open-mouthed with admiration and excitement, stood looking on in long, unobtrusive row, close against the wall on either side of the mahogany cabinet. As Gisbort now gazed thitherward, a light began to break into his eyes — the light of recollection — and then he turned once more to Geretie.

"It was something about the cabinet, Geretie — it was — yes, I know it now. Old Cornelis Hillebrandt said — and he smiled pleasantly at me, Geretie, as he might have at you, in spite of all your ideas

to the contrary — he said — and he held out a long roll of parchment and shook it, as it were, in my face — he said — ‘*search the mahogany cabinet.*’ But what I am to search for, or how or when, I do not know. It seems, indeed, that we all own this Hillebrandt dream, Geretie; and, therefore, it should be sent for something very important. But if, after all, this is the whole of it, why then the sooner we take no further notice of it and forget it altogether, the better.”

So Gisbort pleasantly spoke, with a knowing wink; emboldened, — as the Byvanck letter seems to hint, — into passing ridicule of the Hillebrandt dream, by the subtle power of the punch.



## CHAPTER VJ.

**E**VEN as Gisbort thus spoke, there came from the hall a slight cry of alarm, mingled with the sharp sound of splintering wood, the mahogany cabinet was seen to bend forward with a rocking motion, then recovers itself, while a portion of its heavy cornice fell to the floor. There was a momentary stir among the guests, and Geretie and her father hurried to the scene of the disturbance.

Nothing alarming, indeed. It was speedily ascertained that the mischief all came from the little negro boys Rak and Tak. They had been in the line of self-invited guests from the kitchen; and finding it impossible, by reason of their immature stature, to see all that they desired, had climbed upon the shoulders of two tall footmen, steadying themselves in that uneasy position by clinging to the front cornice of the mahogany cabinet. There for a while standing content, until their supporters becoming restive beneath their weight had suggested a descent. Thence it was no more than natural that Rak and Tak, looking around for respite and seeing how smooth was the top of the cabinet, should have decided upon climbing thereon. But the heavy cornice, upon which for the moment they hung wriggling in their attempted ascent, though stoutly framed had not been calculated to sustain the weight



of two clumsy, half-grown negroes; and therefore breaking off with a crash had let them down upon the floor, itself tumbling after them. No bodily damage was found to have been done. The authors of the mischief picking themselves up, slunk off between the legs of the other servants into the kitchen, there doubtless to meet the ire and the uplifted spoon of old Chloë. The guests prepared to resume the interrupted dance; no evidence of the disturbance remained except the mutilated front of the cabinet. Where once there had been a cornice, there was now exposed a long narrow opening, not before known to have existed — in fact, a secret recess.

"See, father," cried Geretie, grasping him by the arm, and, pale with sudden excitement, pointing upward to the opening. "Surely it must be there that you were told to search."

At first sight, indeed, there seemed nothing to tempt a search; but following the direction indicated, her father raised himself upon a chair and thrust in his arm. Far back in the cabinet, his hand encountered a roll of parchment, dusty, torn and time-stained. Carefully he spread it out between Geretie and himself. And lo! a word being deciphered here and there revealed the long missing Hillebrandt Patent, signed by their High Mightinesses of Holland, and with their great, heavy seal attached; furthermore signed and sealed by His Excellency Governor Stuyvesant; and in order that no formality might be neglected, having in one corner a rude picturing of bow and arrows, the emblematic signature of some

Indian chief who had previously owned the patented tract of land.

The Hillebrandt Patent, indeed! The long sought evidence wherewith the heir might now recover all his rights! As Gisbert once more rolled up the parchment, there stepped before him a young, slight-built officer of the British army — one of those two or three who had not danced, and quietly took the patent into his own hands.

"Mine at last, is it not?" he said. "I could not but believe that in the end fate would favor me."

The light-brown beard and his studied seclusion in a distant corner of the room had hitherto prevented Heybert's recognition; not to speak of the alteration made by the military uniform, so honestly won by brave deeds against the French, upon the Canadian frontier. But, in spite of all such disguises, the voice could not be mistaken; and with a cry, Geretie threw herself forward and clung to him. A foolishly impulsive girl, of course; and who, more properly, should have stood apart in maidenlike reserve, until she might be asked for, with all solemn dignity of form. Indiscreet, indeed, to make a scene before that wondering crowd. But it passed off very well, somehow; nor was she obliged to endure the ignominy of repulse, inasmuch as Heybert placed his arm about her, and drew her still closer to his side.

"You see how it is," he said to her father, with a quiet smile. "You cannot but feel that after all it must be so."

"Yes, Heybert, I suppose that it must be so," Gisbert rejoined. And this is all that passed. But

every one soon knew what had been said; and so, in a moment, the word went round that Heybert Hillebrandt had returned, and that Geretie had at last become his promised bride. And though there were those who said that old Gisbort Van Twiller would not have consented, except for the fortunate discovery of the missing patent, they did him wrong; since in his heart he had already relented, seeing that the affair with Rollof Van Schoven had by no means prosperously advanced, and that Geretie would doubtless have proved obstinate in her choice to the very end.

Therefore the matter stood thus decided in those few words; and after some temporary buzz of comment, the dancing was resumed as though it had never been interrupted. And now, Gisbort, taking pleasant consultation with himself, and, doubtless, gaining courage through one or two additional glasses of punch, came to one of those resolves, that if failing, gain all the odium of foolhardiness; but that, if succeeding, are looked upon as the product of pure inspiration. Nothing did he say to Mistress Lysbeth, who, doubtless, acting according to the dictates of social ceremony, would, from the very first, oppose his plan; but craftily retiring into a distant corner, he beckoned up young Johan Van Twiller, his nephew.

"Run, Johan," he whispered, "run at once to the Hillebrandts and all the rest of them. Tell them that Heybert has returned and is to marry Geretie; that the old quarrel should be made up at last; and that they must, every one of them, come, without

delay, to the Christmas party. Tell them, too — if they say anything about it — that when Heybert and Geretie are married, I will give them the mahogany cabinet for one of their wedding presents. Now start off ~~at once~~; and, as you know what is good for you, never stop to say a word about it to Aunt Lysbeth."

With a nod of shrewd comprehension, young Johan hurried off and soon delivered his message in different quarters of the city. There was much excitement thereat, and hurried putting on of old brocades and satins, and stitching together of laces and piling up of head-dresses; for all those guests who had remained away from the great entertainment had done so with regret powerfully tugging against the necessary display of resentment, and each one now hailed with pleasure the opportunity to come in at last, with dignity unimpaired. Never in all Albany, or elsewhere, indeed, either before or since, had so many fair dames and damsels departed, with such success, from their custom of giving up many hours to the toilet, and made themselves ready in so few minutes.

At one time, indeed, there was a chance that their coming might work disastrously, after all. For when, in the Van Twiller mansion, it became known that Heybert was to be permitted to marry Geretie, the Van Schoven family and all their adherents naturally took offense, conceiving that a slight had been committed upon their young kinsman, and, therefore, that family self-respect demanded the ceremonious departure of each and all of them.

Whereby such stern resolves began to be formed, that it became more than likely that the stream of reconciled Hillebrandts, Hogebooms, Jansens, Tienhovens and Wyncoopes coming in would encounter at the very door a tide of angry Van Schovens, Swartwouts, Winegaerts and Van Fredingborcks going out. But young Rollof Van Schoven, seeing that a storm was brewing, took his kindred one by one aside; and told them that he had renounced all claim to Geretie, not merely now but the day before, inasmuch as he had then met a scout who had led him to suspect that Heybert, instead of being destitute among the Hurons, was serving, with glory, in the British army, and would soon return. Whereat they being all, in secret, loth to depart from such a pleasant party unless obliged to by their principles, wisely argued that if Rollof was not dissatisfied, neither should they be; and so remaining, joined heartily in the grateful work of reconciliation.

And now once more the sets were formed, and the three black fiddlers played another tune still merrier than any that had gone before, though that might seem scarcely possible; so that it was said that the Lieutenant-Governor became inspired to engage in another minuet, and essayed to lead out old Mistress Barbara Van Schoven. This, indeed, was scarcely credited; though many of those who disbelieved the story, afterward gave unwavering credence to the tradition, that the portrait of Governor Van Twiller had nodded its head all through the dance in pleased sympathy. And, again, was the punch bowl filled; for, of course, Gisbort and his

friends must drink many reconciliatory glasses with the newly arrived Hillebrandts and Hogebooms and all the others. And so the Christmas party was kept up, with fun and frolic, even until the clock struck twelve — a departure from time-honored custom — which caused much comment; whereat the English minister and the Dutch dominie, upon the next Sunday, felt constrained to interpolate their sermons upon the "Character of Jereboam" and the "Massacre of the Innocents," with some suitable remarks about the growing tendency to social dissipation. This reproof was properly received by all the young, and, doubtless, did them much good; but was not as well favored by the wardens and elders, inasmuch as it necessarily caused an alteration in discourses that might better have been left as they had always been used to hear them.

So, after all, on that Christmas day, the pretty Geretie obtained her present of a husband, and chosen by herself, as she had proclaimed to be her right; while at the same time Heybert Hillebrandt regained his ancestral manor. Not much of a manor, indeed. Only some three or four miles broad upon the river and ten or twelve miles deep, and with not more than eighteen or twenty first-class mill sites. But, for all that, a property well suited for the support of two young people of moderate tastes and ambition; while the future soon revealed the story of its proper management. For, before many years, the Hillebrandt house was built, not far from the Van Twiller mansion; not as large, indeed, inasmuch as already property upon that

street was becoming costly, and even the most wealthy could no longer afford houses of over seventy-five feet front. But to make amends, it rejoiced in the hitherto unknown extravagance of a stone stoop, and had a gilded weathercock upon the gable as handsome as the Van Twiller weathercock. And within the house was a large sitting-room, in all respects like the Van Twiller sitting-room, except that over the fireplace, instead of the portrait of Governor Van Twiller, hung that of old Cornelis Hillebrandt. It might have been thought, indeed, that Geretie Hillebrandt would set little value upon the portrait of one who, coming in a dream to visit her and tell about the missing title-patent, so stupidly blundered in his ill-timed approach, that the dream, instead of pertaining to her alone, was broken up, and lay scattered in three heads, and almost irrecoverably lost. But, possibly, she regarded rather the good intent of the act than its careless carrying out. It is certain, indeed, that she looked favorably upon the old councilor; for, in the letter which afterwards, in accurate and circumstantial narration of the dream, she wrote to her dear friend, Mistress Anneke Byvanck, of Kinderhook—the time-stained letter of which we have heretofore so often spoken—she alludes most lovingly to the picture of old Cornelis Hillebrandt, and evidently regards it as the chief and crowning glory of her mansion.