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The Brownie's Xmas

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

THE Brownie who lives in the forest,
Oh, the Christmas bells they ring!
Has done for the farmer's children
Full many a kindly thing:

When their cows were lost in the gloaming,
He has driven them safely home;
He has led their bees to the flowers,
To fill up their golden comb;

At her spinning the little sister
Had napped till the setting sun—
She awoke, and the kindly Brownie
Had gotten it neatly done;

Oh, the Christmas bells they are ringing!
The mother she was away,
And the Brownie played with the baby,
And tended it all the day;

The Brownie who lives in the forest,
Oh, the Christmas bells they ring!
Has done for the farmer's children
Full many a kindly thing.
'Tis true that they never spied him,
Though their eyes were so sharp and bright,
But there were the tasks all nicely done,
And never a soul in sight.

But the poor little friendly Brownie,
His life was a weary thing;
For he never had been in holy church
And heard the children sing;

And he never had had a Christmas,
Nor bent in prayer his knee;
He had lived for a thousand years,
And all weary-worn was he.

Or that was the story the children
Had heard at their mother's side;
And together they talked it over,
One merry Christmas-tide.

The pitiful little sister
With her braids of paly gold,
And the little elder brother,
And the darling five-year-old,

All stood in the western window—
'Twas toward the close of day—
And they talked about the Brownie
While resting from their play.

"The Brownie, he has no Christmas,"
The dear little sister said;
A-shaking sadly as she spoke
Her glossy, yellow head;

"The Brownie, he has no Christmas;
While so many gifts had we,
Last night they fairly bent to the floor
The boughs of the Christmas-tree."

Then the little elder brother,
He spake up in his turn,
His sweet blue eyes were beaming,
And his cheeks began to burn:

"Let us make up for the Brownie
A Christmas bundle now,
To leave in the forest pathway
Where the great oak branches bow.

"We'll mark it, 'For the Brownie,'
And 'A Merry Christmas Day! '
And he will be sure to find it,
For he must go home that way!"

Then the tender little sister
With her braids of paly gold,
And the little elder brother,
And the darling five-year-old,

Made up a Christmas bundle
All tied with ribbons gay,

And marked it, "For the Brownie,"
With "A Merry Christmas Day!"

And then in the winter twilight,
With shouts of loving glee,
They hied to the wood, and left their gift
Under the great oak-tree.

While the farmer's fair little children
Slept sweet that Christmas night,
Two wanderers through the forest
Came in the clear moonlight.

And neither of them was the Brownie,
But sorry were both as he;
And their hearts, with every footstep,
Were aching heavily.

A slender man with an organ
Strapped on by a leathern band,
And a little girl with a tambourine
A-holding close to his hand.

And the little girl with the tambourine,—
Her gown was thin and old;
And she toiled through the great white forest,
A-shining with the cold.

"And what is there here to do?" she said;
"I'm froze i' the light o' the moon!
Shall we play to these sad old forest trees
Some merry and jigging tune?"

"And, father, you know it is Christmas-time;
And had we staid i' the town,
And I gone to one o' the Christmas-trees,
A gift might have fallen down!"

"You cannot certainly know it would not!
I'd ha' gone right under the tree I
Are you sure that never one Christmas
Is meant for you and me?"

"These dry, dead leaves," he answered her,
"Which the forest casteth down,
Are more than you'd get from a Christmas-tree



In the merry and thoughtless town.

"Though to-night be the Christ's own birth-day night,
And all the world has grace,
There is not a home in all the world
Which has for us a place."

Slow plodding adown the forest path,
"Now, what is this?" he said;
Then he lifted the children's bundle,
And "For the Brownie," read.

The tears came into his weary eyes:
"Now if this be done," said he,
"Somewhere in the world perhaps there is
A place for you and me!"

Then the bundle he opened softly:
"This is children's tender thought;
Their own little Christmas presents
They have to the Brownie brought.

"If there lives such tender pity
Toward a thing so dim and low,

There must be kindness left on earth
Of which I did not know.

"Oh, children, there's never a Brownie
That sorry, uncanny thing;

But nearest and next are the homeless
When the Christmas joy-bells ring."

Loud laughed the little daughter,
As she gathered the toys in her gown:
"Oh, father, this oak is my Christmas-tree,
And my present has fallen down!"

Then away they went through the forest,
The wanderers, hand in hand;
And the snow, they were both so merry,
It glinted like golden sand.

Down the forest the elder brother,
In the morning clear and cold,
Came leading the little sister,

And the darling five-year-old.

"Oh," he cries, "he's taken the bundle!"

As carefully round he peers;

"And the Brownie has gotten a Christmas

After a thousand years!"

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