

The Mistletoe

A Christmas Tale

By Mrs. Mary Robinson

A farmer's wife, both young and gay,
And fresh as op'ning buds of May;
Had taken to herself, a Spouse,
And plighted many solemn vows,
That she a faithful mate would prove,
In meekness, duty, and in love!
That she, despising joy and wealth,
Would be, in sickness and in health,
His only comfort and his Friend—
But, mark the sequel, and attend!

This Farmer, as the tale is told—
Was somewhat cross, and somewhat old!
His, was the wintry hour of life,
While summer smiled before his wife;
A contrast, rather form'd to cloy
The zest of matrimonial joy!

'Twas Christmas time, the peasant throng
Assembled gay, with dance and Song:
The Farmer's Kitchen long had been
Of annual sports the busy scene;
The wood-fire blaz'd, the chimney wide
Presented seats, on either side;
Long rows of wooden Trenchers, clean,
Bedeck'd with holly-boughs, were seen;
The shining Tankard's foamy ale
Gave spirits to the Goblin tale,
And many a rosy cheek—grew pale.

It happen'd, that some sport to shew
The ceiling held a MISTLETOE.
A magic bough, and well design'd
To prove the coyest Maiden, kind.
A magic bough, which DRUIDS old
Its sacred mysteries enroll'd;
And which, or gossip Fame's a liar,
Still warms the soul with vivid fire;
Still promises a store of bliss
While bigots snatch their Idol's kiss..

This MISTLETOE was doom'd to be
The talisman of Destiny;
Beneath its ample boughs we're told
Full many a timid Swain grew bold;
Full many a roguish eye askance
Beheld it with impatient glance,
And many a ruddy cheek confest,
The triumphs of the beating breast;
And many a rustic rover sigh'd
Who ask'd the kiss, and was denied.

First MARG'RY smil'd and gave her Lover
A Kiss; then thank'd her stars, 'twas over!
Next, KATE, with a reluctant pace,
Was tempted to the mystic place;
Then SUE, a merry laughing jade
A dimpled yielding blush betray'd;
While JOAN her chastity to shew
Wish'd "the bold knaves would serve her so,"
She'd "teach the rogues such wanton play!"
And well she could, she knew the way.

The FARMER, mute with jealous care,
Sat sullen, in his wicker chair;
Hating the noisy gamesome host
Yet, fearful to resign his post;
He envied all their sportive strife
But most he watch'd his blooming wife,
And trembled, lest her steps should go,
Incautious, near 'the MISTLETOE.

Now HODGE, a youth of rustic grace
With form athletic; manly face;
On MISTRESS HOMESPUN turn'd his eye
And breath'd a soul-declaring sigh!
Old Homespun, mark'd his list'ning Fair
And nestled in his wicker chair;
HODGE swore, she might his heart command—
The pipe was dropp'd from HOMESPUN'S hand!

HODGE prest her slender waist around;
The FARMER check'd his draught, and frown'd!
And now beneath the MISTLETOE
'Twas MISTRESS HOMESPUN'S turn to go;
Old Surly shook his wicker chair,

And sternly utter'd—“*Let her dare!*”

HODGE, to the FARMER'S wife declar'd
Such husbands never should be spar'd;
Swore, they deserv'd the worst disgrace,
That lights upon the wedded race;
And vow'd—that night he would not go
Unblest, beneath the MISTLETOE.

The merry group all recommend
An harmless Kiss, the strife to end:
“Why not?” says MARG'RY, “who would fear,
“A dang'rous moment, once a year?”
SUSAN observ'd, that “ancient folks
“Were seldom pleas'd with youthful jokes;”
But KATE, who, till that fatal hour,
Had held, o'er HODGE, unrivall'd pow'r,
With curving lip and head aside
Look'd down and smil'd in conscious pride,
Then, anxious to conceal her care,
She humm'd—“*what fools some women are!*”

Now, MISTRESS HOMESPUN, sorely vex'd,
By pride and jealous rage perplex'd,
And angry, that her peevish spouse
Should doubt her matrimonial vows~
But, most of all, resolved to make
An envious rival's bosom ache;
Commanded Hodge to let her go,
Nor lead her to the Mistletoe;
“Why should you ask it o'er and o'er?”
Cried she, “we've been there twice before!”

'Tis thus, to check a rival's sway,
That Women oft themselves betray;
While VANITY, alone, pursuing,
They rashly prove, their own undoing.