

**THE BACHELOR'S
CHRISTMAS AND THE
MATRIMONIAL TONTINE
BENEFIT ASSOCIATION**

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The Bachelor's Christmas and the Matrimonial Tontine Benefit Association by Robert Grant

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ROBERT GRANT


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"WISH YOU MERRY CHRISTMAS AND—AND HERE'S TO HER!"

**THE BACHELOR'S
CHRISTMAS**

The Bachelor's Christmas
and The Matrimonial
Tontine Benefit Associa-
tion. By Robert Grant

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THE BACHELOR'S CHRISTMAS

I

THOMAS WIGGIN, or Tom Wiggin, as everyone called him, sat alone in his bachelor quarters on Christmas-eve, waiting for a carriage. The carriage was not late, but Tom, who was a methodical man in everything he did, had finished his preparations a little sooner than need be. His fur coat and hat and gloves lay on a chair beside him, ready to put on the moment Bridget, the maid, should knock at the door and tell him that Perkins, the cabby at the corner, was blocking the way. Tom had already taken out of his pocket two ten-dollar gold pieces and laid them on the centre-table beside an array of packages done up with marvellous care in the whitest of paper and the reddest of ribbon. One of the gold pieces was for Bridget and the other for Perkins. Twice the sum

would not have replaced the crockery and objects of vertu which the Hibernian hand-maiden, who brought up his breakfast and was supposed to keep his room tidy, had smashed since he had tipped her last; and Tom had, only two months before, undergone the melancholy experience of falling through the bottom of Perkins's coupé, because of the pertinacity with which that common carrier of passengers clung to the delusion that no repairs to a vehicle were necessary until it dropped to pieces. But as Tom would have said if interrogated on the subject by a subtler mind, Christmas comes but once a year, and though Bridget's best was her worst, she had tried to do it, and Perkins, shiftless as he was, had driven his poor old nag one day into a pink lather in endeavoring to catch a train for him, which he had just missed after all.

Besides, Tom had had a remarkably good business year, so that a ten-dollar gold piece did not seem to him the dazzlingly large sum he had regarded it ten years earlier. He had lived in these same bachelor lodgings for ten years, and during that time had built up a very neat business by his own unaided

effort, as his contemporaries (and contemporaries are apt to be stern critics) were ready to admit. He had worked hard and steadily, taking only enough vacation to enable him to keep well, and shunting everything to the background which threatened to interfere with the object he had in view—that is, everything but one thing. And this one thing he had made up his mind five years ago was out of the question. Consequently he had shunted it to the background with everything else, and devoted himself more unreservedly than ever to the real estate business.

Ten years is quite a piece out of any man's life, and though Tom Wiggin was the picture of health, he was, as we say colloquially, no longer a chicken. He was stouter than he had been and had lost some of his hair, which gave him rather a middle-aged appearance, or at least suggested that he never would see thirty-five again. When he had taken his present room he had been a slim and almost delicate-looking stripling without a copper, whom any girl might be likely to fancy. To-day, in his own estimation and in that of his friends and acquaintances, he was

a well-seasoned old bachelor who was not likely to ask any one feminine to share his comfortable competency.

Christmas comes but once a year, and Tom had for several years past been in the habit of recognizing the fact in his special way. He was extensively an uncle. That is to say, he had two married sisters, one with five and the other with three children of tender age, and each of his two married brothers had presented him with a nephew and niece of the name of Wiggin. Categorically speaking, he had seven nephews and five nieces to provide with Christmas gifts, not to mention his two sisters and his two sisters-in-law, all of whom had grown accustomed to expect a package in white paper tied with pink ribbon and marked "with love and a merry Christmas from Tom." Here were sixteen presents to begin with, and there were apt to be almost as many more. On this particular Christmas evening there were thirty-five parcels in all, each done up with immaculate care, for Tom, like most other bachelors, prided himself on doing everything in a thorough, deliberate fashion. He had made his last purchase a fortnight ago, and had spent