

**THE BELTONS'  
CHRISTMAS  
PUDDING**

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The Beltons' Christmas Pudding by Mrs. John Brett

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**MRS. JOHN BRETT**

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BELTONS' CHRISTMAS PUDDING.

BY  
MRS. JOHN BRETT.



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## THE BELTONS' CHRISTMAS PUDDING.

### CHAPTER I.

*"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife."—PROV. xvii. 1.*

"To-morrow will be Christmas-eve, mother," sighed little Pauline Belton, a blue-eyed maiden of nine years, with bright brown curls.

"Well, love, is that a sighing matter?"

"No, I was not sighing exactly for that."

"For what, then, did such a sigh escape from your merry little heart?"

"We shall have no Christmas pudding this year, shall we, mother?"

"No; but surely that is nothing to grieve about. I'm sure if you could look into many a home this hard, cold winter, you would find plenty to sigh about, worse than our having no pudding, let alone the poor creatures who have not even a home or any comforts as we have. I shall begin to fear that my little Pauline

is growing greedy, like Marietta Drummodo, who will get her lame brother's share as well as her own when she can, and says that 'pudding is the best thing out.' "

"Oh, mother, dear! I hope not. But, indeed, I want the pudding for all the rest more than for myself."

"We will see how happy a Christmas-day we can have without it, Pauline. I had hoped to save enough to give you this treat, but the weather has been so freezing, that all my extra money has gone for coals, and I could not go into debt for a luxury."

"But you are not in debt at all, mother, are you?" asked her eldest son, Robert, who was nearly fifteen years old, and errand-boy at the grocer's for a shilling a week and his dinner. He was home for his breakfast now, and looked up from his scantily-buttered crust with some surprise and dread upon his face—"I should be ashamed to go to my work if you owed Mr. Plumpton money!"

"No, Robert. Thank God I have been able to pay for everything; but I should not if we had indulged in anything beyond the commonest neces-



saries. But I believe better times are coming for us, if we can tide over till the spring."

Robert munched his crust in silence for a minute, and then resumed—

"You won't have any decorations put up this year, I suppose?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! If there's no Christmas-fare it will seem like a mockery to one's appetite to see the place covered with holly."

"I am just of the contrary way of thinking," answered his mother, smiling. "I shouldn't have supposed that 'Christmas-fare' had anything to do with the matter. What are the decorations put up in the church for, but to show our Christian joy that Jesus came down to this world of ours to bring glorious salvation for us by His life and death? Is not that plenty to make us glad on the coldest Christmas-day that ever dawned, even if we had nothing better than dry bread for our dinner?"

"Yes, mother; indeed, it is. How could I be so forgetful? But this will seem such a curious Christmas, although, as you say, we have many

more comforts than numbers of people. Then we'll put up the holly all the same. If Charley and Max will bring it in before the evening—there's plenty out on the common—I'll see what I can do when I come home. We shan't be able to make this little cottage look like the dear old 'Grange,' though."

"I shall go too," said little Pauline. "And we will have such a big bundle by the time you come back."

"Don't let Pauline go, mother dear," said Robert. "I can't bear to think of her going out in the frost; it's dreadful enough for any one, but her poor little arms get so blue with the cold."

"But you forget that poor Charley's hands are all covered with chilblains," urged Pauline; "I'm sure I don't see how he could out or carry the prickly stuff."

"Oh, never mind my chilblains," exclaimed Charley, "Max can gather it, and I'll take a basket or cloth to carry it. We'll manage."

"You must not bring away too many of the berries," said Mrs. Belton, "because there are so many birds to be supplied with them, and I think the glossy leaves are quite as pretty."

"Good-bye, mother," said Robert, kissing her as he went out; "I shall have a whole holiday on Christmas-day, and we won't spoil it for the want of a pudding."

"No more will I," laughed Pauline; "but I do wish poor Charley's hands would get well. To-morrow we are to go to the Vicarage, and see the grand Christmas Tree, and there will be lots of nice warm things for us. I hope I shall get some wool mittens; if I do, I shall give them to Charley."

"It is bad, indeed, to have such sore hands," replied her mother. "And is it not bad, too, for poor grandfather, now his sight is failing so fast? He cannot even read in the old family Bible; so he has to sit and think for many hours, instead of reading as he used to."

"I read to him every day," said Max; "and then he knows a lot by heart. I wish I knew as much as grandfather does, because I shouldn't have to work so hard at the verses for Sunday-school."

"You have not lived quite so long as your grandfather; but how glad and thankful he is that he has read and learnt so much of the Bible when