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The Bishop's Shadow

by I. T. THURSTON
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CHAPTER VIII.

THEO'S SHADOW WORK.

THE days that followed were very busy ones for both Nan and Theo. The girl spent most of her time over the stove or the moulding board, and the boy, delivering the supplies to many of the families in the two big tenement houses, attending to his stand, and selling evening papers, found the days hardly long enough for all that he wanted to do.

As he went from room to room with Nan's bread and soup and gingerbread, he soon learned much about the different families and found plenty of opportunities to serve as the "bishop's shadow," in these poor homes. Money he had not

to give, for every penny that he could possibly spare was laid aside for a special purpose now, but he found countless ways to carry help and sunshine to sad and sore hearts, without money.

One morning he left Nan's room with a basket piled with bread—brown and white—in one hand, and a big tin pail full of boiled hominy in the other. He went first to the top floor, stopping at one door after another, where dirty, frowzy women and children opened at the sound of his cheery whistle. He handed in the loaves, or the measures of hominy with a gay word or a joke that more than once banished a frown from a woman's worn face, or checked the tears of a tired, hungry child. Children were getting to be fond of the boy now, and he liked it.

In one room there were two families and half a dozen children. In one corner, on a rickety couch was a crippled boy, who had lain there day after day, through long, weary months. He was listening intently for that whistle outside the door, and when he heard it, his dull eyes brightened, and he called out eagerly,

"Oh, tell him to come in a minute—just a minute!"

The woman who opened the door, said indifferently, "Tommy wants you to come in a minute."

Theo stepped over to the tumbled couch, and smiled down into the wistful eyes of the sick boy.

"Hello, old man!" he said, cheerily. "I've brought you something," and out of his pocket he pulled a golden chrysanthemum that he had picked up in the street the day before, and had kept all night in water. It was not very fresh now, but Tommy snatched it hungrily, and gazed at it with a happy smile.

"Oh, how pretty—how pretty it is!" he cried, softly smoothing the golden petals with his little boney forefinger. "Can I keep it, truly?"

"Course. I brought it for you," Theo answered, his round, freckled face reflecting the boy's delight. "But I must scoot. Folks 'll be rowin' me if their bread's late."

He ran off leaving the sick boy with the flower held lovingly against his thin white cheek, while his eyes followed wistfully Theo's strong, active figure as he hurried away.

On the next floor, an old woman, bent and stiffened by rheumatism, sat alone all day, while her children were away at work. She could not get out of her chair, or help herself in any way. Her breakfast would be a penny's worth of Nan's hominy, but on this morning her children had gone off without even setting out a dish, or a cup of water for her.

Tode brought her a saucer and spoon, filled a cup with fresh water from the faucet, and pulled up the curtain so that the sunlight would shine in upon her.

"There, old lady," he said, brightly, when this was done, "now you're all right, an' I'll be in again an' fix your dinner for ye."

The old woman's dim eyes looked after him, and she muttered a word of thanks as she turned slowly to her breakfast.

The boy wasted no minutes, for he had none to spare, but even when he did not step inside a door at all, he always had a smile or a bright word ready for each customer, and in lives where sin or grinding poverty has destroyed all hope, and life has become simply dull, dogged endurance of suffering, a cheerful word or smile has a wonderful power. These wretched women and forlorn little children had already begun to look forward to the coming of the "bread boy," as the little ones called him, as a bright spot in their days. In almost every room he managed to leave a hint of cheer behind him, or at least to lighten a little the cloudy atmosphere.

His pail and basket empty, he ran back to Nan's room for his own supplies, and having opened his stand he served his customers, taking his own breakfast between whiles, as he had opportunity. He sold the morning papers, too, at his stand, and between twelve and one o'clock he was as busy as a boy could well be. After that hour few customers appeared, and then, having made his midday meal from whatever he had left, he closed his stand and went home.

Then was his time for a little more of what Nan called his "shadow work," when he refilled with fresh water the cup of the rheumatic old woman, or carried her a cup of tea that Nan had made for her, adding to it, perhaps, a cookie or a sandwich that remained from his stock. Or he glanced into a room where two or three children were locked in all day while the mothers were away at work—and attended to the fire for them. Often he found time for a five minutes' chat with crippled Tommy, and now and then he walked awhile with a sick baby in his arms as he had seen the bishop do that day long before. They were all little things that the boy did, but as he kept on doing them day after day, he found in this



service for others such happiness as he never had known before.

Tommy's delight in the half-withered chrysanthemum set Theo to thinking, and the result of his thinking was that he began to frequent the flower stalls and pick up the broken blossoms that were occasionally thrown aside there.

One day a woman who was selling flowers said to him, "Say, boy, what do you do with the flowers you pick up? I've seen you 'round here after 'em lots o' times lately."

"Give 'em to sick folks an' poor ones that can't get out anywhere," replied the boy, promptly.

The woman searched his face to see if he were deceiving her, but there was nothing sly or underhanded in the clear eyes that returned her gaze so frankly.

"Hm-m," she murmured, thoughtfully. "What do you do Saturday nights, boy?"

"Nothin' much, after I've sold out my papers."

"Well, Saturday night's our busy time here; one of our busy times, that is, an' if you want to come 'round an' help for an hour or two, I'll pay you in the flowers that are left over."

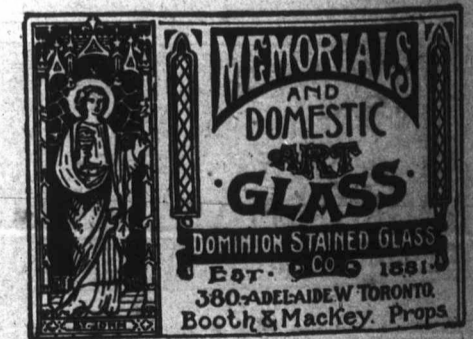
Theo's eyes brightened, but he was shrewd, and was not going to bind himself to an agreement that might not be satisfactory.

"I'll come next Sat'day an' try it," he said.

(To be continued.)

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