



SANTA CLAUS IN THE PULPIT.

BY REV. WASHINGTON GLADDEN, IN "ST. NICHOLAS."

"One and a half for Billington!"

The speaker was standing at the ticket window in the station of the Great Western Railway. Evidently he was talking about tickets: the "one" was for himself, the "half" for the boy who was clinging to the small hand-satchel, and looking up rather sleepily at the ticket-seller's face.

"When do you wish to go to Billington?" inquired that official.

"On the next train: eleven o'clock, isn't it?" asked the traveller.

"That train does not run Saturday nights; no train leaves here for Billington until to-morrow, at midnight!"

"But this train is marked 'daily' in the guide."

"It was a daily train until last month."

"Well, here's a how-d'ye-do!" said the tall gentleman, slowly; "only three hours' ride from home, on the night before Christmas; and here we are, with no help for it but to stay in Chicago all Christmas Day. How's that, my son?"

"It's bad luck with a vengeance," answered the lad, now thoroughly awake, and almost ready to cry. "I wish we had stayed at Uncle Jack's."

"So do I," answered his father. "But there is no use in fretting. We are in for it, and we must make the best of it. Run and call that cabman who brought us over from the other station. I will send a message to your mother; and we will find a place to spend our Sunday."

This was the way it had happened: Mr. Murray had taken Mortimer with him on a short business trip to Michigan, for a visit to his cousins, and they were on their return trip; they had arrived at Chicago, Saturday evening, fully expecting to reach home during the night. The ticket-agent has explained the rest.

"Take us to the Pilgrim House," said Mr. Murray, as he shut the double door of the hansom; and they were soon jolting away over the block pavements, across the bridges, and through the gayly lighted streets. It was now only ten o'clock, and the Christmas buyers were still thronging the shops, and the streets were alive with heavily-laden pedestrians who had added their holiday purchases to the Saturday night's marketing, and were suffering from the embarrassment of riches. Soon the carriage stopped at the entrance of the hotel, and the travellers were speedily settled in a second story front room, from the windows of which the bright pageant of the street was plainly visible.

While Mortimer Murray is watching the throngs below, we will learn a little more about him. He is a fairly good boy, as boys average: not a perfect character, but bright and capable, and reasonably industrious, with no positively mean streaks in his make-up. He will not lie; and he is never positively disobedient to his father and mother; though he sometimes does what he knows to be displeasing to them, and thinks it rather hard to be reproved for such misconduct. In short, he is somewhat self-willed, and a little too much inclined to do the things that he likes to do, no matter what pain he may give to others.

The want of consideration for the wishes and feelings of others is his greatest fault. If others fail in any duty toward him, he sees it quickly and feels it keenly; if he fails in any duty toward others, he thinks it a matter of small consequence, and wonders why they are mean enough to make such a fuss about it.

This is not a very uncommon fault in a boy, I fear; and boys who, like Mortimer, are often indulged quite as much as is good for them, have great need to be on their guard against it.

Before many moments Mortimer wearied of the bewildering panorama of the street, and drew a rocker up to the grate near which his father was sitting.

"Tough luck, isn't it?" were the words with which he broke silence.

"For whom, my son?"

"For you and me."

"I was thinking of your mother and of Charley and Mabel; it is their disappointment that troubles me most."

"Yes," said Mortimer, rather dubiously. In his regret at not being able to spend his Christmas day at home, he of course had thought of the pleasure of seeing his mother and his brother and sister and the baby; but any idea of their feelings in the matter had not entered his mind. Only a few hours before, in the Murray's home, Nurse with the happy baby in her arms had said to Charley and Mabel:

"Cheer up, children, and eat your supper. Your papa and Master Mortimer will surely be here by to-morrow."

But Mortimer so many miles away had not heard this. Now he glanced up at his father and spoke again:

"When shall we have our Christmas?"

"On Monday, probably. We can reach home very early Monday morning. We should not have spent Sunday as a holiday if we had gone home to-night. Our Christmas dinner and our Christmas-tree must have waited for Monday."

"Do you suppose that mother will have the tree ready?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"My! I'd like to know what's on it?"

"Don't you know of anything that will be on it?"

"N—no, sir."

Mortimer's cheeks reddened at the questioning glance of his father. He had thus suddenly faced the fact that he had come up to the very Eve of Christmas without making any preparation to bestow gifts upon others. He had wondered much what he should receive; he had taken no thought about what he could give. Christmas, in his calendar, was a day for receiving, not for giving. Every year his father and mother had prompted him to make some little preparation, but he had not entered into the plan very heartily; this year they had determined to say nothing to him about it, and to let him find out for himself how it seemed to be only a receiver on the day when all the world finds its chief joy in giving.

Mortimer had plenty of time to think about it, for his father saw the blush upon his face, and knew that there was no need of further words. They sat there silent before the fire for some time; and the boy's face grew more and more sober and troubled.

"What a pig I have been!" he was saying to himself. "Never thought about getting anything ready to hang on the tree! Been so busy in school all last term! But then I've had lots of time for skates and tobogganing, and all that sort of thing. Wonder why they didn't put me up to think about it! P'raps they'd say I'm big enough to think about it myself. Guess I am. I'd like to kick myself, anyhow!"

With such discomforting meditations, Mortimer peered into the glowing coals; and while he mused, the fire burned not only before his feet but within his breast as well—the fire of self-reproof that gave the baser elements in his nature a wholesome scorching. At length he found his pillow, and slept, if not the sleep of the just, at least the sleep of the healthy twelve-year-old boy, which is generally quite as good.

The next morning, Mortimer and his father rose leisurely, and after a late breakfast walked slowly down the avenue. The air was clear and crisp, and the streets

were almost as full of worshippers as they had been of shoppers the night before; the Christmas services in all the churches were calling out great congregations. The Minnesota Avenue Presbyterian Church, which the travellers sought, welcomed them to a seat in the middle aisle; and Mortimer listened with great pleasure to the beautiful music of the choir, and the hearty singing of the congregation, and tried to follow the minister in the reading and in the prayer, though his thoughts wandered more than once to that uncomfortable subject of which he had been thinking the night before; and he wondered whether his father and mother and the friends who knew him best did really think him a mean and selfish fellow.

When the sermon began, Mortimer fully determined to hear and remember just as much of it as he could. The text was those words of the Lord Jesus that Paul remembered and reported for us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And Doctor Burrows began by saying that everybody believed that, at Christmas-time; in fact, they knew it; they found it out by experience; and that was what made Christmas the happiest day of the year. Mortimer blushed again, and glanced up at his father; but there was no answering glance; his father's eyes were fixed upon the preacher. The argument of the sermon was a little too deep for Mortimer, though he understood parts of it, and tried hard to understand it all; but there was a register in the aisle near by, and the church was very warm, and he began looking down, and after awhile the voice of the preacher ceased, and he looked up to see what was the matter, and there, in the pulpit, was—who was it! Could it be? It was a very small man, with long white hair and beard, and ruddy cheeks, and sparkling eyes, and brisk motions. Yes; Mortimer had quite made up his own mind that it must be he, when a boy by his side, whom he had not noticed before, whispered:

"Santa Claus!"

This was very queer indeed. At least it seemed so at first; but when Mortimer began to reason about it, he saw at once that Santa Claus, being a saint, had a perfect right to be in the pulpit. But soon this did not seem, after all, very much like a pulpit; it had changed to a broad platform, and the rear was a white screen against the wall; and in place of a desk was a curious instrument, on a tripod, looking something like a photographer's camera and something like a stereopticon. Santa Claus was standing by the side of this instrument, and was just beginning to speak when Mortimer looked up. This was what he heard:

"Never heard me preach before, did you? No. Talking is not my trade. But the wise man says there's a time to speak as well as a time to keep silence. I've kept my mouth shut tight for several hundred years; now I'm going to open it. But my sermon will be illustrated. See this curious machine?" and he laid his hand on the instrument by his side; "it's a wonder-box; it will show you some queer pictures—queerest you ever saw."

"Let's see 'em!" piped out a youngster from the front seats. The congregation smiled and rustled, and Santa Claus went on:

"Wait a bit, my little man. You'll see all you want to see very soon, and may be more. I've been in this Christmas business now for a great many years, and I've been watching the way people take their presents, and what they do with them, and what effect the giving and the taking has upon the givers and takers; and I have come to the conclusion that Christmas certainly is not a blessing to everybody. Of course it isn't. Nothing in the world is so pure and good that somebody does not pervert it. Here is father-love and mother-love, the best things outside of heaven; but some of you youngsters abuse it by becoming selfish and greedy, and learning to think that your fathers and mothers ought to do all the work and make all the sacrifices, and leave you nothing to do but to have a good time."

Just here Mortimer felt his cheeks reddening again, and he coughed a little, and opened a hymn-book and held it up before his face to hide his blushes.

"So the fact that Christmas proves a damage to many is nothing against Christmas," Santa Claus continued; "but the

fact that some people are hurt by it more than they are helped is a fact that you all ought to know. And as Christmas came this year on Sunday, it was my chance to give the world the benefit of my observations.

"There is one thing more," said the preacher, "that I want distinctly understood. I am not the bringer of all the Christmas gifts." Here a little girl over in the corner under the gallery looked up to her mother and nodded, as if to say, "I told you so!" "No; there are plenty of presents which people say were brought by Santa Claus, with which Santa Claus had nothing at all to do. There are some givers whose presents I wouldn't touch; they would soil my fingers or burn them. There are some takers to whom I would give nothing, because they don't deserve it, and because everything that is given to them makes them a little meaner than they were before. Oh, no! You mustn't believe all you hear about Santa Claus! He doesn't do all the things that are laid to him. He isn't a fool."

"And now I'm going to show you on this screen some samples of different kinds of presents. I have pictures of them here, a funny kind of picture, as you will see. Do you know how I got the pictures? Well, I have one of those little detective cameras—did you ever see one?—that will take your portrait a great deal quicker than you can pronounce the first syllable of Jack Robinson. It is a little box with a hole in it, and a slide, that is worked with a spring, covering the hole. You point the nozzle of it at anybody, or anything, and touch the spring with your thumb, and, click! you have it, the ripple of the water, the flying feet of the racer, the gesture of the talker, the puff of steam from the locomotive. I've been about with this detective, collecting my samples of presents, and now I'm going to exhibit them to you here by means of my Grand Stereoscopic Moral Tester, an instrument that brings out the good or the bad in anything, and sets it before your eyes as plain as day. You will first see on the screen the thing itself, just as it looks to ordinary eyesight; then I shall turn on my reonian light through my ethical lens, and you will see how the same thing looks when one knows all about it, where it came from, and why it was given, and how it was received."

"First, I shall show you one or two of those presents that I said I wouldn't touch. Here, for example, is an elegant necklace that I saw a man buying for his wife in a jewellery store yesterday; I caught it as he held it in his hands. There! isn't it a beauty? Links of solid gold, clasp set with diamonds; would you like it, girls?"

"H'm! My! Isn't it a beauty!" murmured the delighted children, as they gazed on the bright picture.

(To be Continued.)

A CHRISTIAN PHILANTHROPIST.

A leading feature in the character of General Gordon was a dislike of complimentary speeches. "No gilt," he would exclaim imperiously; "no gilt, mind, no gilt. Say what is to be said, but no praise. I do nothing. It is an honor if God employs me. Do not send me your paper with anything written about me; and mind—do not forget, no gilt!" No doubt he knew, as all know, how easy it is to be puffed up; and so he wisely sought to avoid temptation. He would very seldom talk of himself at all, and when he did so, he never claimed merit. A book was written about his work in China, and he was asked to read it before it came out. Page after page—the parts about himself—he tore out to the poor author's chagrin, who told him he had spoiled his book! "No man," he said, "has a right to be proud of anything; he has received it all." He had many medals, for which he cared little. A gold one, however, given to him by the Emperor of China, with a special inscription, he did value. But it suddenly disappeared; no one knew where or how. Years afterwards it was found out by curious accident, that he had erased the inscription, sold the medal for ten pounds, and sent the sum anonymously to Canon Miller for the relief of the sufferers from the cotton famine in Manchester.—Rev. Chas. Bullock.