

THE LITTLE WILLOW CROSS.

[A true story, vouched for by the Rector of the Parish, who has known the family mentioned in it for 40 years. It shows the continued blessings which came to a family who followed the command in Malachi, iii. 10.]

'Twas but a fragile and worthless thing,
The bark of a willow stem,
A thread of moss, and a tiny shell,
Half hiding a wild flower gem,
But in the centre the dear cross stood
And bore on its branches a wealth of good
Such as the trusting and childlike find—
Food, shelter, raiment, and peace of mind.



loving pastor stood in the midst of a family group, left suddenly through no fault of theirs, without the means of providing for the commonest needs of life. He had no idea of the extent of their loss, though he knew it was very great, so there was no shadow on his brow, as in cheering tones he said, while placing before the mother a little decorated card, "Take this, you are skillful and will know what to do with it. Crosses like this can be sold for fifty cents each." This delicate specimen of handiwork was so small, a child might have enclosed it in the palm of his hand, but it was exquisitely beautiful in design and execution, and the cross in the midst of it all had a depth and preciousness of meaning, which she to whom it was presented could well appreciate, and of this the pastor was fully aware. Before saying good night he knelt, as was his wont, and committed these dear members of his flock into the keeping of their Heavenly Father, assured that His trusting children would not be left desolate.

The following morning the head of the household counted out the entire contents of his purse—seven dollars. The number though so small, was a precious and significant one, and leaving two dollars of the seven with his sorrowing family, he "went out," somewhat as did the Patriarch of old, "not knowing whither he went." But the patriarch's faith sustained him, and as he gave the parting kiss and crossed the threshold of the home which had been so full of light and happiness, he lingered to say, while his voice trembled, and tears filled his eyes, "From this time henceforth I am resolved to give to the Lord one-tenth of all that I receive, be it more or less, and *nothing shall deter me.*"

These words were uttered with intense earnestness, because he had long wished to act upon this conviction of his conscience, but had been prevented by unprincipled associates in business, from whom he was now, after much suffering, happily free.

Thus resolving to allow nothing to interfere with that sacred duty, he departed full of hope, for he had read and pondered over and over again during many years, the sacred words in Malachi—"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse"—and now he would "prove" the Lord as commanded, confident of obtaining the promised reward.

When the door closed behind him on that weeping group, the mother of the home hastened to the retirement of her closet, and in like spirit asked

for that blessed guidance without which she would not venture a single step. Then filled with a peace which cannot be told, she prepared to carry out her pastor's suggestions.

It is said that while a person is drowning the memories of a whole life are crowded into a moment of time. In a similar manner, as the mother looked at her pastor's gift, there flashed before her ready at hand, all the needed treasures which her task required. Spotless immortelles of holy and tender associations, brought in the happy past, from the neighborhood of Lake St. Sacramento—shells from Indian seas and from sunny waters near the landing place of Columbus, and from the classic shores of Attica, given by dear ones then in the land of the blessed—scarlet beads grown among Flora's tropical treasures, that had encircled with links of gold, a baby sister's neck—moss from the resting places of those early loved and sleeping in Jesus—fairy ferns from the homes of world-renowned poets and sages of both hemispheres—lichens from the mountain abode of bishop and priest and Christian artist of high position in the Church they honored—roseate and golden-hued buds from Jerusalem and from Mar's Hill, and from the cradle of our religion at Bethlehem.

Cards, too, of suitable size and quality were there, which had been waiting in a cherished portfolio since school girl's busy days. All these quickly revealing themselves at memory's call, were brought from accessible hiding places, and laid upon the table which was now no longer to be used for the well cooked meal, round which the family circle were wont to gather at the close of day, but for real work, where actual bread winners must labor from morning till night.

But one thing more was wanting to complete the items required, and that was bark for the crosses. From attic to cellar, and all through the dry and leafless yard, the strictest search failed to discover aught which would answer the purpose. Faith was being tried, and this was a severe test, because the work could not ever be begun till the crosses had been shaped and put in place. But the Blessed Comforter was with them and suffered not their faith to fail.

A bright boy, ten years of age, comprehending the need, went out through the wintry blast, into the city's crowded streets, and in a very short time returned with an arm full of the choicest willow twigs, freshly parted from the tree. No seekers for hidden treasure ever experienced a truer joy on finding what they sought, than did the waiting ones, at this result. Had a visible Hand reached down from the sky and laid the gift at their feet, they would not have felt more certainly than they did now, that it came from above. Who can say it was only an accident that caused a florist near by to trim his saplings at that hour, in a hitherto unnoticed nursery at the terminus of an alley, and then to carry them such a distance to the roadway, at the precise moment when the eager boy might