

## "Mother's Children."

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY WILLIAM CLYDE FITCH.

You see, we knew it would be a sad Christmas for mother and father. For that matter, it would be sad for us, too; but then we were young—at least, that was what most everyone said, as if it made a difference; so, we supposed must. We were surprised, when we counted, to find how short a time it was since Dick had left us—it did seem so very long. We always say Dick has gone away; it sounds too cruel to say our dear old Dick is dead. Not that he was really old, for he was the youngest, and the pet of the family. Mother always called him "her baby," and father "his boy." Arthur used to say he didn't see where we came in, unless we were father's baby and mother's boy, which always made me laugh, but which was true. We did find out what we were. It was that dreadful day when we had come back from the churchyard, and the house was, oh! how still and lonely! and in the library, where was Dick's little chair in the corner, and the clock as if the whole world had been emptied out and I was in it alone. Mother came in, looking so sad, with her eyes full of tears—she who had been so brave through it all—and Arthur and I went up and put our arms about her. She held us close to her, and kissed us both and said: "My children, my children! I had what Arthur calls an Adam's apple in my throat, and could not speak a word; but he said: 'Yes, mother, that is what you are—your children; and we will never leave you, or be anything but your children,' while I laid my cheek against her, and squeezed her hand, to show her I meant it too.

We had had such a dear Christmas last year, though Dick was quite ill for a part of the day, from eating too much candy apples whose cheeks were painted a most beautiful red. Mother had told him not to eat them, but he forgot that until they were both eaten. I remember so plainly how he sang in church the night before last, like an angel; even Aunt Sue spoke of it, and she never praises anyone.

Dick had been gone now ever since spring, and, as I said, we knew this Christmas would be very sad for dear mother and father; so Arthur and I went into the playroom and wrote our lessons and held a meeting to decide what "mother's children" should do to make this Christmas brighter. Arthur was so funny! He said we must behave legally, and the proper way to do was to resolve ourselves into a committee of the whole. I didn't know what that was, but was willing it would not be too much trouble; and it proved no trouble at all, for you only had to say you were so, and there you were. I told Arthur he must have made some mistake, for this was just like when I used to pretend I was Queen Elizabeth in one of mother's wrappers, with my hair rolled up, and a napkin ring on it for a crown, giving a (penny) ring to the Earl of Leicester, which was Arthur in my cape and grandfather's sword; but Arthur said there was no pretense about it, and it was just like a girl for me to think so. I don't know what I should be like if I isn't a girl. Arthur seems to forget there's anything besides boys. Well, after we had been a committee of the whole, Arthur appointed me vice-president and secretary, and that left president and treasurer for him. I wanted to be treasurer very much, but I didn't say anything, for I saw Arthur wanted it; still, I didn't think it would be for me to do it, but Arthur told me there was enough for a girl. When he saw how disappointed I was, though he did say it would request his resignation he would give up his office, but of course I didn't want to do anything like that. Then we talked over plans, and every time I had an idea, something very nice, Arthur would have one, too, and call me to order and say the president had the floor, which meant he was to tell his idea first. I did get so discouraged!

We decided, besides, being very good, and not going off by ourselves that day, we must begin by having a grand surprise. We must give both father and mother a lovely present without their expecting it. The only trouble was how to get it. We boys had our own ideas, but we'd been saving up for Christmas, but if we gave all we had in them to mother and father, instead of giving to Bridget and Jane, and our "poors," which we always did, they would not be pleased at all, we knew. So Arthur said the committee of the whole would retire and draw up a plan to present to the president, but as the schoolroom was the only place we wouldn't be interrupted in, we only pretended to retire. And all of a sudden I had a splendid idea. I watched Arthur till I made sure he had no idea to call me to order, for, and then I told him. It was this: First, we would go to father, make him promise on his honor he would not tell, and then ask him, instead of giving us a Christmas present, to give each of us the money, so we could get something for mother; and next, go to mother and do the same with her. With all that money we could get both a beautiful present. We knew what father would probably give us—we always did. Mother was the one who surprised us; we used to tell father what we wanted. Arthur was going to ask for a bicycle, and I had made up my mind for a willow-wood chair—a little one with light blue ribbon bows, to have all for myself in my own room. I had hate to give up my chair, but I knew it was selfish to feel that way; and mother always told me selfish people were unhappy, so I determined I would not be selfish and unhappy, and I pretended that if I had gotten the chair it would be uncomfortable, and broken down with me the first time I sat in it. Arthur thought my plan a good one, though he did want a bicycle very much; still, he wanted more to help mother and father. It made me feel better to have him on my side about the bicycle, because I had felt the same way about my chair, and I told him what a disappointment that would have turned out if I had asked for it, and advised him to pretend he'd have taken a "header" off the bicycle the second time he mounted it, so he couldn't ride for months. I thought it would help him a great deal. But he only told me I was just like a girl again, which I am getting used to now, and don't mind

so much. When we had made up our minds to give up our presents, we both said we had not dreamed it would be so easy. We were so happy over our plan that, after all, we were glad to have this way instead of any other; it seemed more like mother's way. That was all we could do that day, so Arthur declared the committee honorably discharged, and the meeting adjourned sine die. Ever since he had commenced reading Oscar he had been very proud of his Latin, but even I knew enough to know *sine die* was wrong, because we had to meet the next day, there was so little time before Christmas. I told Arthur, and he said we could meet all the same, only that was the proper way for closing the meeting.

The next morning we met again, when we should get for her present. I was to think of mother's and Arthur of father's. I could not decide between a sealskin sash and a piece of statuary for the parlor. I thought mother really ought to have the sash—for she always went out, no matter how stormy or cold it was, if there was a poor person to visit or one in trouble who needed her; but I knew it must cost a "very great deal." For that matter, I was afraid a piece of statuary would, too; but I knew mother was very fond of statuary, for I had heard her say so often. Arthur had brought a set of books for father, and said it would have to give up both the sealskin sash and the statuary for mother, for both would cost more than we could spend. That only made me all the more anxious to get them; but I did not have enough money, of course, or we would have to give them up. It was hard work thinking of something else. Arthur proposed getting mother a party dress, though he knows she never goes to parties, except little teas or dinners or something like that, and I told him I guessed a party dress would cost as much as the statuary. He said we could get one ready-made, and ready-made clothes were always cheaper; but after a while he acknowledged that clothes would be horrid. Then I had such an idea.

"Arthur, I cried, 'a picture of Dick!'"

"The very thing," he said. "Else, you're a trump. A crayon head!"

"A large one, in a frame."

"Yes, and we'll go and see Mr. Lorne about it." Mr. Lorne was an artist friend of father's, and he worked in the corner, who would do it the best and quickest.

Father consented to the plan for mother's sake, and mother did, thinking it would cheer up father, and both promised to be as prompt as possible. Of course we did not tell either what the present was, for we decided we would have to give the picture to both together. We had such a time deciding how to give it. I said, give the picture to mother and the frame to father—the picture to mother because she always called Dick her baby. But Arthur said father always called him his boy, so why not give the picture to father? And finally we settled it that the best way was to give it, all framed, to both.

Mr. Lorne found out for us that the right person to make the picture, and helped us choose the frame. We had a sweet photograph of Dick in his chorister's robe, to have copied; and we ordered a broad, old oak frame, with a pair of mitres from Mendon's church, without words, burned across the top. We were very hard to keep the secret, only I knew all the surprise would be gone if I told, and then I wouldn't, anyway, because Arthur said I would.

Christmas Eve the picture came; we smuggled it upstairs into my closet, and hung my best dress over it so no one could see it. Arthur and I were so happy, and did feel so mysterious. When I went upstairs to get my hat and cloak to go to church, he actually caught me, and we kissed and kissed, though he hardly ever did. We all went to church together. It looked beautiful, with the ropes of green winding round the big white pillars, and the wreaths on the gallery railing, and over the chancel, in letters of holy, the "Peace on earth, good will to men." We had been used to not seeing Dick amongst the choristers, but somehow to night all the old feeling came back when I heard the faint "Amen" to the prayer away off in the robing room; and then the sweet, distinct sound of his voice, as he sang, until up in front of the chancel there came, led on and urged on by the organ—

"On—ward—Chris—tian—sol—diers—  
March—ing—on—to—war!"

I felt as if I could not see it; as if I must see Dick there at the head of the boys, and hear his voice as it always came out high and sweet above the others, on

"With the cross of Jesus,"  
and then dropping again,  
"Go—ing—on—before."

Looking up, I saw the old look of pain come over the old minister's face, and I was ashamed to think how, that night of all nights, I was forgetting to help. I shut my eyes, for I knew the words as well as Dick had known them, and I just thought down the tears, and, slipping my hand into mother's as we stood up, I sang too.

I forgot Dick was gone; I saw him in the choir, just as he looked in the picture, only he was singing, singing with me! It seemed as if I could hear his voice sweeter and clearer than all the others, and I sang, and forgot everything—forgot the church, and everybody about me, everything except Dick!

"Glor—y—land—and—hon—or,"  
up swelled the music, and it seemed as if angels were waving the "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men." Then, with another "Amen," the music stopped and service began, and brought me back from I did not know where. I still had hold of mother's hand, and she was looking at me in a strange sort of way, and there were tears in her eyes, but she smiled, and, besides, the tired, pained look in her face was gone.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

When we came down stairs Christmas morning, Arthur and I took father and mother to the door of father's study, where we had put Dick's picture, so that it would be the first thing you saw as you went into the room. Arthur had a little speech, which he had written out and learned, to make before we went in; it was really very good, just like the big speeches in the newspapers, and commenced, "Ladies and

gentlemen!" but he forgot it right in the middle, and ended with just telling our plan, and why we did it. Then we all went in. Mother started and cried "Oh! but father didn't say one word; he says this way instead of any other; and then put his arm about mother, and, going nearer, they stood looking at the picture together. I cried—I could not help it—and Arthur turned his back, till mother called us, and took us in her arms as she had done that dreadful day in the spring, saying again, "My children, my children!"—only there was a difference. Father was wiping his glasses, but when he had finished he kissed us both, and said, "God bless you, my dears."

Tom White and Peter Smithers.

It was a cold snowy morning, a few days before Christmas, when Tom White (familiarly called "Windy" by his friends), awoke to find himself shivering and without a cent in his pockets. Tom was a bootblack by profession, and had wandered about from town to town trying to make enough to keep body and soul together. He finally concluded to try his luck in one of the leading cities of Ohio as his place of abode. His best friend was Peter Smithers, a new boy. The two boys were constantly together, when not at work, and they were ever ready to fight for one another, and to help each other in all their troubles. They were both of the same age, and were both of the same family, and were both of the same name, and were both of the same color, and were both of the same height, and were both of the same weight, and were both of the same shape, and were both of the same size, and were both of the same age, and were both of the same family, and were both of the same name, and were both of the same color, and were both of the same height, and were both of the same weight, and were both of the same shape, and were both of the same size, and were both of the same age, and were both of the same family, and were both of the same name, and were both of the same color, and were both of the same height, and were both of the same weight, and were both of the same shape, and were both of the same size, and were both of the same age, and were both of the same family, and were both of the same name, and were both of the same color, and were both of the same height, and were both of the same weight, and were 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