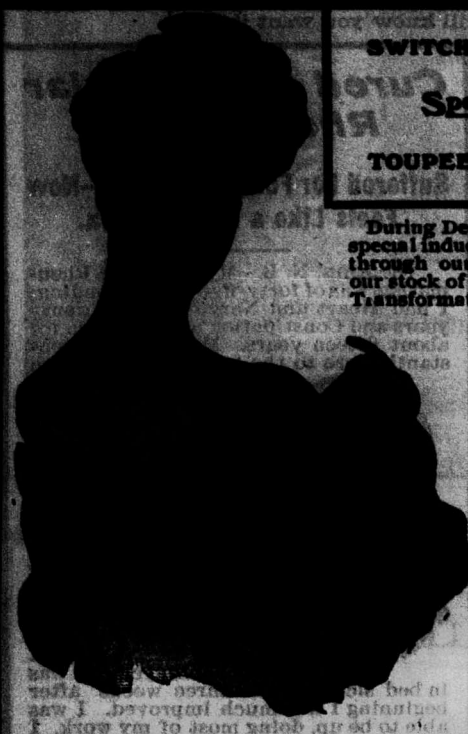


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## Christmas Forgiveness.

By MRS. JAMES FARLEY C.X.

With the first thought of Christmas comes the anticipation of the joyous gathering of the family to keep the feast. And as we lovingly linger over the dear names of those who, however separated by the dividing paths of their individual destinies, yet turn with yearning love toward home, a hunger and thirst of the heart arise which it is hard to appease. Father and mother crave for the sight of the dear faces, which, though every hour changes with life's experiences, remain ever to them those of the little children once so eagerly bright with the hope of Christmas joy.

### Fathers and Mothers Who Will Not Forgive.

And there are moments of inexpressible pain, when grief points to the vacant chairs whose owners have passed and have reached the shore where we believe life is one long festival of sorrowless activity. We cannot at times like these easily lift our spirits to their clear atmosphere, and are tempted to stretch out our selfish arms to draw them once again within our reach. I see here before me now faces of men stern with repressed feeling, and of women down whose cheeks tears fall, some with meek patience, some with sobs of comfortless resistance.

Courage, dear people, courage and faith! Lift up your hearts and share a joy which you cannot give them even in your closest embrace. What, after all, is the touch of your fond hands and the gladness of the Christmas feast at home compared with the continual presence of Him whose very name gives all the light to Christmas here—who can compare with the knowledge they could only receive at the hands of Death? They have not lost us! With eager expectation they wait our coming and every Christmas-tide brings us nearer to them. These are our blessed ones and they are not far off—the unseen world which they inhabit envelops ours—they are near. Of all the vacant places around our board by long odds those which Death has emptied are those which give us least cause for grief.

A far sadder thing exists among us. To my deep sorrow I know of homes into which the children born under the roof are forbidden to enter: there are fathers and mothers who, should they hear the familiar voices of their children—their children, they to whom they gave life—calling outside the door, would rise and bar it against them. This is the extremity of hardness far exceeding the official inflexibility of an executioner, and truly a strange position for a frail and erring man or woman to hold toward the creature who is flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone.

A sort of pause succeeds this thought in our bewildered minds; there is an element of incredulity in it. The voice of a child crying, "Let me come home," and the father who be-gat the child and the mother who brought such a child into this world answering: "I am done with you; you have sinned away your rights; you no longer have a home."

### To Err is Human, to Forgive Divine.

And, strangely enough, this is the action of what are known as "good Christian people"! It is frequently a father, who kneels twice a day and unwittingly draws a just judgment down upon him as he prays, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," who hears and denies the appeal. "Father, forgive me and let me come home," falls on a deaf ear and on an unmoved heart. What if "He who so loved the world that He sent" into its misery and darkness "His only Son" to call all the great family or man to keep the perpetual Christmas feast of His forgiveness around the manger-bed in Bethlehem should take this man at his cruel word and treat him according to his prayer! Is there no danger that a gate he hopes to enter by-and-by—the gate of the eternal home—shall according to this measure be shut against him forever?

A son or daughter who stains and degrades a good name, honorable among men, is capable of wounding more deeply, of hurting more sorely, than either friend or foe. But forgiveness is another matter. Though we felt the life-blood trickling from the deep wound as we went forward to un-bar the door it could not seem possible that we should not forgive.

### The Story a Great Picture Tells.

A famous poet-painter of England has told an awful story in a great picture which, with all my heart, I wish we had here before us. He has painted the famous Blackfriars bridge which crosses the Thames in London. The hour is that desolate time just at the glimmer of a winter dawn, when few are abroad—the hour when human vitality is at its ebb and the majority of the dying leave this world. The faint light in the east has not power to illuminate the river, dark with the foulness of the city it traverses. But it is easy to discern the two figures who are the only human beings in sight. A young, frail woman creeps toward the edge of the bridge, peering hopelessly down into the cold treachery of the gliding water. You know at a glance that in homeless wretchedness she is going to throw herself down and end the hopeless struggle of her life. A vigorous young man is making his early way to the great city, only half seeing the road he travels. With a strong, compassionate grasp he snatches the poor dying creature back and holds her from her purpose. Their faces tell a strange chapter in human experience. Once, not so long ago, she had been his pretty sweetheart in the village in which they had been children; some foul temptation had carried her away suddenly and he had searched for her in vain. Coming to market from the fields she had so often crossed he had discovered her at last. The horror mingled with pity in his face, the pleading misery of hers are drawn with awful reality.

"Found," the painter called his wordless story. God keep any father and mother here with us from so finding some young forsaken child to whom they have refused forgiveness and an open door. God grant that now, while we prepare the Christmas feast, some broken heart yearning for the peace and protection of her father's house is not looking into the waters which will cover her and her unforgotten error out of men's sight forever!

### How Best to Keep the Christmas Feast.

What time so fitting, so compelling to our forgiveness as His festival of love? An unforgiving heart cannot keep a true Christmas! It is a mere pretense without the Christ-child, and He by His nature and mission, by His deep, searching words, has made it impossible for Him to enter where relentless hardness bars out a penitent child.

If, having lost her honor, a poor girl carries the burden of her unborn child until it, poor unwelcome little one, is laid in her arms—she has already shown that her heart is not dead, her soul still undestroyed. Should she with penitent entreaties come back to you carrying her burden of mingled love and shame, will you refuse her entrance? Where shall she go to hide her bowed head if it is not to those who gave her life? Shall she add murder to the pitiful stain that has blackened her life? She brings a little innocent creature to you to be saved, to be kept clean—a lamb to be offered to God.

The "new-born King" when He came to His day of teaching said: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." Are you ready to send this little one out into a cruel, evil world, to be an outcast among outcasts, and bear the responsibility? This innocent little child of an erring mother is your off-

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