

Striding along in the hope of meeting a belated vehicle of some kind, he thought of his friends all assembled, of course, by this time, in the brilliantly-lighted rooms, where in feasting and hilarious laughter and singing in the excitement born of generous wines and witty, nay perhaps even ribald conversation—they meant to spend the night till the daylight dawned.

Think of it! Thus to celebrate the Holy Night on which God became Man for us and for our salvation. The Blessed Night on which He began His life of poverty, self-sacrifice and sufferings!

Furiously Robert strode on, till in the distance he saw the two lamps of a cab, gleaming dully, passing the end of the street. Hailing it loudly, he was delighted to see it stop, then turn and move towards him.

It was a great relief. A muttered "thanks be" had hardly escaped his lips when, close by, a faint sound reached him. Weak though it was, it was an unmistakeable appeal for help. Almost at his feet lay a barefooted boy, clothed in the merest rags and tatters, sinking down against the wall in utter exhaustion.

Naturally kind hearted, Robert stooped, and, by the glare of the street-lamp, saw that the little fellow was almost frozen to death; yet, a feverish light shone in the large eyes as they met his own, and lighted up the thin emaciated face, showing it blue with cold and hallowed with hunger and misery.

"Good heavens, I believe he is dying!" he muttered. "In the name of all that's vexatious what am I to do? Hello, little man," he said gently, touching the boy.

"Where's your home?"

"I have none," very faintly came the reply.

"Merciful goodness? Have you any friends?"

A shake of the head was the only reply. By this time the cab had come up, and calling to the man to turn the horse's head and draw up close to the curb, battle royal was waged with his conscience.

A duty, most unpalatable, and recognized unwillingly and resentfully, had been thrust upon him.

"Why," he wondered, in his annoyance. "He is nothing to me; it's no business of mine. If I give him some money..."