

name and stern by nature," was the commonplace and not very elegant remark his neighbors would make about him, whenever it came in their way to remark him at all, which was but seldom, as most of them were families of affluent means, and did not move in business circles. They *knew* he was a man of strict rectitude—that his word was as good as his bond—and against his moral conduct, none could whisper a word. Yet they *thought* him callous to pity, deaf to charity, and that Mammon was his shrine.

His housekeeper was an old widow lady named Mrs. Jones and a perfect shrew, who if he had been a man of much conversation or inclined to argument would have scolded him as fast as she did her neighbors' boys, when they climbed her fence or threw stones into her yard; which they sometimes did, just to hear her scold; for, alas! for the depravity of human nature, boys have a propensity that way; for which let them not be censured, when old ladies will be foolish enough to scold. The whole care and management of his house was left to her. Her housekeeping suited him; that was all he wanted, and he asked her no questions. He, therefore was not to be blamed if beggars were spurned from the door, for he did not know it; but his neighbors were not aware of that fact, and so they put *him* and not *her* down for it, and drew their inferences accordingly.

The clock struck eight, and he was still lost in his reverie. Happy he certainly did not feel, and his thoughts at last found vent in words, "No!" he exclaimed, "I cannot think of a kind act or benevolent deed performed by me for the last three years, and where is the aim or purpose of my life?" Why not begin, then? a still small voice within him seemed to say, and then as if answering it, he broke out again, "Ah, but where shall I begin—how make a commencement?" Suddenly a thought came upon him and he resolved to put it in execution forthwith. "Yes," he said, "I will take a quiet walk through the streets, and notice the passers by. I may perhaps observe some unfortunate fellow creature whom I can in some way assist, or some poor inebriate whom I can at least advise to go home, and this will, at all events, be a beginning, however small."

He at once arose, drew on his overcoat and gloves, set his fur cap on his head, with the air of a man who had purposed, and was determined to perform.

So he sauntered forth. The night, as we have stated, was cloudless—clear and cold, and the hard-packed snow crinkling under-foot at every step, but to a person clad as he was, the cold was not biting, only free and invigorating. As he passed along the crowded streets, troops of merry little boys and girls; throngs of young men and laughing maidens flitted by in quick succession, all comfortably protected against the weather, and looking gay and happy, and he was almost beginning to waver in his purpose, when he thought of trying another section

of the city, the residents of which were of the poorer class. Threading his way along, and just as he was passing a baker's shop window, his eyes became fixed on a little earnest face almost pressed against the glass, surveying the tempting-looking delicacies, which were nicely arranged within. He stopped short, and gazed intently on that little form. Was there anything in the features which reminded him of the little girl which had once been his dearest treasure, or was it the peculiar, nay even hungry look, which the child's countenance expressed, as she wistfully, though all unconscious of being observed, peered within. He noticed too, as he viewed her, that though decently and even neatly clad, her garments were very thin, in fact entirely unsuitable for the season, and thought he observed her shivering. He looked again and was sure of it, and if the thrill which passed through—what his neighbors' never supposed he had—his heart, was not pity, then we do not know what name to give it.

"Is there anything in there you would like to have, my little girl?" he gently said in a low voice as he stooped to address her.

The little creature looked up, and covered away from him, but did not reply. He repeated his question again, in such a manner and tone as completely re-assured her, and she quickly answered

"Yes, sir," but instantly checking herself, said "No, sir."

"Which am I to take for an answer, my dear? This is Christmas Eve, you know, and perhaps Santa Claus may not come to your house. So if there is anything in there you would wish for; let me get it for you, and you can take it home with you."

"He used to come, but he don't since Ma died; but—" and she stopped.

"But what, my dear," he inquired?

"If I were to take anything home with me, I know Susie would be so angry, and if Pa were to find it out, it would be dreadful," she replied.

"Then let me take it for you, and I will explain to them both in such a manner that they cannot be angry with you. Now tell me truly," he said, looking at her earnestly, "Are you not hungry?"

She hesitated. It was evident to him that she was unaccustomed to telling an untruth; and the question seemed painful. However, she stammered rather than answered—averting her face as she did so—

"Yes sir, and so is poor little Willie, and I think Susie is too, although she won't say so."

"Very well then, let us go in," and taking her by the hand, he was in the shop before he himself thought, or she had time to remonstrate.

For a moment, but only a moment, the thought crossed his mind that it might appear ridiculous to see him, the rich merchant, under such circumstances; but he soon dismissed it; he had made a purpose, and having done so, he was not the man to abandon it.

So he inquired of the baker if he had a spare