

Little Christian.

(A Christmas Story.)

Translated from the French by Antoinette LeBlanc.

CHAPTER I.

It was Christmas Eve, of the year 1759. Winter had set in with great severity; snow covered the earth, and gathering together here and there had assumed fantastic shapes; the river was frozen over, and a sharp wind whistled through the trees of the forest which surrounded Furth, a town situated on the frontier of Bavaria. Clouds covered the sky, and still numerous stars shone in the firmament, as if they too wished to honor the Saviour's birth, while earth celebrated this glorious mystery by thanksgivings and hymns of praise. The soft light of the stars and the whiteness of the snow enabled the faithful, going to midnight Mass, to take a short cut through the woods.

Amidst the roaring of the storm might be heard the majestic sound of the bells calling the faithful to the celebration of this grand feast. Alas! many, were unable to respond to its call; some by reason of sickness, others again whose household duties kept them at home. Of the numbers, was Dame Sabine, whose house was situated about a mile from Furth; she could not leave the house, having contracted a severe cold, and was now seated by the fire piously reading her prayers. In the centre of the room was a table set for three persons. Now and again she would stop her prayers to ask her daughter if she saw her father coming. George Putter, who was a forester in the service of the Prince Elector, had the day before received a summons to appear at the head foresters home at Furth. He promptly obeyed this order, telling his wife that she would likely go to midnight Mass before he came home. While her mother was thus employed, her daughter, Agatha, a sweet child of fourteen summers, was busily engaged in decorating a fir tree, for it is a custom with the Germans that this tree should be placed in the best room on

Christmas eve, in memory of the birth of Christ.

She had twisted colored ribbons and papers among the foliage, and hung golden nuts and apples on its branches, while here and there tame birds flitted gaily from bough to bough, and a pet squirrel ran up and down its trunk with as much joy as if it were free among the trees of the forest. At the foot of the tree was a beautiful crib, which brought to mind the mystery of Bethlehem. George, who was a very pious man and pretty well skilled in the art of sculpture, had taken great pains to carve each memory of the holy family, and Agatha had dressed them. Numerous candles burned around the crib, and shed their light over the room. The young girl was so interested in her task that time was passing so quickly. At last her mother said to her "Agatha, dear, you had better get the fish ready. Your father must soon be here." The child did as she was bid, and while the fish were frying said to her mother, "Tell me what you think of my crib." The mother smiled and said, "You are getting too big to be so passionately fond of these things; when you are older and have more work to do, you will soon forget all this nonsense. It seems to me that at your age I was not childish." "Even if I live to be a hundred," said Agatha, "I shall always love to decorate the crib. See the angels' wings, mother, are they not pretty, and do not their robes fall in graceful folds? Does not the sight of the Mother of God fill you with a holy joy? Look at St. Joseph with his long cloak and pointed hat, has he not a beautiful expression? And how sweet the Divine Infant looks with his large blue eyes and smiling lips. You could almost imagine that father had seen him when he was carving this. "Oh! mother," the child continued, her eyes shining with a holy love, "if you only knew how I wished for the coming