

The woman tried to raise herself, but fell back, saying, "I can't, Bennie, boy, it's too late."

"Too late, mother, why it's only noon; I had just sold my last morning paper, when the swell chap stops, puts me on the head, and pushes the money into my hand, and goes off before I could say thanks; take a sup of this tea, mother, it will help you some."

Again the woman tried to rise, but fell back with a moan. "It's too late, Bennie, I am going away."

"Going away, but you will take Nettie and me with you, mother."

"No, Ben, you must take care of Nettie. Maybe God will help you. I wish I had taught you. I used to know when I was a girl. But it seems so long ago; so long ago, I forget now, but they said, God was good."

"Don't worry, mother. I'll hunt for God, and find him. He will be sure to be good to Nettie, because she has such pretty hair, everybody likes her. But do take a drink of this tea. Mother! mother! don't go to sleep till you have had some of this lovely feast!"

There was no answer this time, and the little lad, thoroughly frightened, flew into the next room, where a woman was busily engaged at the wash tub, and begged her to come in and see his mother.

Hastily drying her hands, she followed him, and bending over the mattress, said, "Your mother is dead, Ben, starved to death, I reckon. She worked too hard keeping you youngsters decent. Dear knows what is to become of you both; with your fine looks, I guess you will be put in an orphan asylum. It's for sich like as you."

The woman's loud voice awoke the little sleeper, and sitting up, she glanced first at the still face of her mother, then seeing Ben's frightened look, commenced sobbing piteously, crying,

"Take me, Bennie, take me; I'm frightened, I is."

The lad took her gently in his arms, and scotched her, then showed her the feast and told her to eat all she could.

The next few days were sad ones to the children, though neither realized what it meant. The neighbours were kind in their way, notifying the authorities, and allowing Nettie to play in their rooms, whilst Ben was selling his papers. At night, the lad would hush the lonely child to sleep, telling her not to fret, brother Ben would take care of her.

And now it was Christmas Eve. Ben hurried home with a warm new bun and a large orange for Nettie. He had done a big day's business. Not only had he sold all his papers, but two gentlemen had employed him to hold their horses, one giving him a dime, the other a quarter.

The unselfish lad determined to take Nettie out, after their frugal tea, show her the bright store windows, and buy her a pair of warm mitts with the quarter. But just as they finished tea, heavy steps were heard on the stairs, and without ceremony, a tall man entered, saying,

"Well, young uns, I guess you know I'm the landlord, eh? You must get out of this, for I've rented the place. I'm sorry for ye, but I can't help it. I don't want to be hard on ye, seeing it's Christmas time, so there's a nickle for ye. Put it in your pocket, lad. You had better ask them as knows, and get the gal put in a gals' home. They're for jist sich as her."

Poor Ben stood like one dazed, listening to the man's retreating footsteps. All thoughts of the store windows vanished from his mind, as he thought of the man's word about "the girls' home." Could it be possible that they would take Nettie from him?

"No, for I promised mother to find God," thought the lad.

"We had better start now, before that man tells anyone about Nettie."

Hastily tying their few things in a bundle, he wrapped the child up as warmly as possible, and quietly carried her downstairs.

The six o'clock bells were ringing; crowds were hurrying in all directions, a few flakes of light snow were floating dreamily in the air. But the children noticed nothing, as they hurried along. Sometimes Ben would take Nettie in his arms. But it was hard work for the lad, and he was thankful to put her down. Presently they turned into a quiet street and saw standing before an hotel, a farmer's waggon, filled with empty barrels, evidently returning from market.

Quick as a flash the boy crept into the waggon, and moved the barrels, making room for two to sit comfortably, then lifting Nettie up, he climbed in beside her, re-arranging the barrels, making it impossible to be seen.

"Where is we going?" asked the child.

"Hush, dear you musn't talk. We are going to find God. I promised mother I would."

"Is he good, Bennie?"

"Yes, I guess so; mother knew him long ago. I guess he lives in the country, cause if he lived in the city, we would have seen him."

In a few minutes the unsuspecting farmer came out, and calling cheerily to his horses, they started off at a gentle trot, and the children curled snugly up, were soon fast asleep.

For nearly two hours they slept, the horses continuing their steady trot. At length Ben was awakened by the farmer jumping down, stamping his feet, and slapping his hands together. Then the clang of a heavy gate, and the crunch, crunch, of the snow under the man's feet, told Ben they were alone.

Peeping over the waggon, he saw a large iron gate, which led into the grounds surrounding a good sized house. Hastily getting down, he also passed through the gateway. The moon was shining now, and the boy espied over in a corner what looked like a tiny house. Hastening across the unbroken snow, he pushed open the door, and looked in. Then, with a quiet laugh, he hurried back to the waggon, and lifted the still sleeping child out, whispering gently,

"Oh, what fun a dear little house just big enough for us two."

He struggled across the snow again with his little burden, and placed her gently on the rustic bench which ran round the house. Hardly had he done so, when he heard the hearty laugh of a man, and peeping out, he saw a flood of light stream from the side entrance of the house. The farmer stepped into view, saying,

"Well, good-night, and a merry Christmas to you all. I'll bring them apples next week," and down the pathway he came, whistling merrily, and the house door closed with a bang.

"I guess them folks up there are nice," thought the lad, or that man wouldn't have come out so happy, and wishing them a merry Christmas. I wonder—maybe it is—I will ask before Nettie wakes up hungry."

With one look to make quite sure that she was fast asleep, the lad slipped quietly out, and hastened to the door the farmer had just left. Ben pulled the bell, and heard it go clanging through the house, his heart thumping so heavily, that when John, the footman, opened the door, he could hardly gasp out,

"Please, sir, does God live here?"

"Now, see here, young man, none of that nonsense. If you want something to eat, ask for it. My missis never turns anyone away hungry from these doors, but I don't want any make-believing."

"Please, sir, I promised mother to take Nettie to God, and I thought he might live here, so I just asked whilist she was sleeping."

"What in the world are you talking about, and who is Nettie?"

"My sister, she is asleep out there."

"Out in the snow, do you mean?"

"No, in that little house down in the corner. But please, sir, don't take her away from me, and put her in a 'Girls' Home.' She'd die like mother, and so would I."

"In the summer house, you mean. See here boy, if you are lying to me, I'll—I'll—never mind, but I will. Now come with me," and together they crossed to the summer house.

"Hush," said the lad, "don't wake her, she will be so hungry."

"Well, I'm blest! I do declare!" said John, as he gazed from one to the other. "You stay here, boy, till I go and speak to missis." Then he vanished, blowing his nose like a trumpet as he hurried to the house.

John had lived as footman to Mrs. Irwin for many years. He could remember the Christmas time when bright lights flashed from every room, and laughter and music seemed to fill every corner of the house. But two years ago the angel of death had robbed the house, not only of the husband and father, but also of the young life just budding into beautiful womanhood. Since that time the

house had been shrouded in gloom. Heart and brain of the childless widow seemed completely stunned.

"Come in," said a sad voice, in answer to John's tap on the door, and with quiet reverent steps the man entered the study.

No light but that made by the fire was burning, and as the flames played hide and seek with each other, they cast weird shadows in every corner of the handsomely furnished room.

"Please, ma'am, there is a lad here, asking for God. He's so pale and sad looking, and has hair like the child Jesus himself, ma'am."

"Well, John, feed them. I wish no child to go hungry from this house."

"Please, ma'am, that's not all. There's a little girl, too, out in the summer house, fast asleep. I don't know what to do with them. It's 'most too late to turn them adrift."

"A little girl, John, did you say, out in the summer house?" and for a moment a look of interest flashed into the woman's face.

"Yes, ma'am. Won't you see them, and tell me what to do?"

"Well, bring them in. Really, I think you and Mary could attend to them without troubling me; but I will see them."

In a few moments both children were standing in the warm hall, looking completely dazed. Never before had they seen such a place. As Mrs. Irwin swept down the stairway, Nettie's little hand clutched Ben's nervously.

What a picture it was, the beautiful hall, with the two poorly clad children standing hand in hand; the stately lady with her heavy crape dress, hanging in sombre folds around her; the old footman, his face very red with blowing his nose violently every few seconds; and Mary, the housekeeper, in the background, the tears streaming down her kind face, which she wiped with the corner of her apron.

It was Nettie who first broke the silence.

"Oh, Bennie, I'm frightened, I'm frightened. I want mozer."

In an instant, like a flash of lightning on a dark sultry night, Mrs. Irwin's face lit up, the eyes lost their steely, set expression, and the motherhood of the woman burst forth.

"Of course you're frightened, dear John, Mary, what do you mean, standing there gazing at these cold, hungry, little ones. Take them Mary, give them a warm bath. Susan will help you. Then they must have a light supper, and be put to bed. Don't lose a moment." Then, turning to John, her whole face alight with nervous excitement, she said,

"What time is it, John?"

"A little after nine, ma'am."

"The stores will be open till midnight. Go and get a ready-made outfit for the lad, I can arrange for the little girl. There must be toys. Don't forget a doll, John. You may choose for the boy, and candles." The tears were shining in the fine eyes now, the first for many a month, and John's voice was husky as he replied,

"All right, ma'am. I will get them things if I have to get the folks out of bed to wait on me. Please God, we will have a merry Christmas."

After the children were tucked snugly up in bed, Mrs. Irwin opened a large chest, in which were treasured many things worn by her own child, and took from it several warm dresses and undergarments, and as she knelt before that chest, the flood-gate of tears opened, and with softened heart she thanked God for sending something to fill her heart that Christmas Eve.

Mrs. Irwin hurried downstairs when she heard the horse and buggy stop at the door, and found John fairly loaded with parcels, and the place all aight, for Mary, with a woman's quick instinct, felt that her mistress would wish for no more darkness.

Nothing was forgotten, and just as the last article was placed away for tomorrow's surprise, the great hall clock struck the midnight hour, and mistress and servants exchanged kindly greetings as they separated.

It was a perfect Christmas Day, the children were awake quite early. At eight o'clock they were neatly dressed, and sitting in the house-keeper's private room before a blazing log fire. Ben was very quiet, but the lad's whole heart seemed shining in his large eyes, but Nettie chattered away like a magpie.

"Look, Bennie, isn't my dress beauti-

ful? It's so soft. I hope mozer has one, too." Then, at a log more cheerful than the others, would burst into song, sending a whooping volley of sparks up the chimney, the sweet childish voice would ring out, filling every corner of the room with laughter.

Presently a rustle of skirts and Mrs. Irwin stood in the doorway. Instinctively the children stood up, gazing at her with wide-open childish eyes. Then Nettie, with outstretched hands ran to her, saying,

"Dood morning, Mrs. Dod, we fided you; mozer told Bennie to."

"I am not God, little one, but if you will, you and Ben shall stay with me, perhaps we shall find God together."

The children's joy and wonder was shared by the whole household, and if at times Mrs. Irwin crept away to shed a few silent tears, they were not altogether sad ones.

As evening approached, and the children were tired with play, Mrs. Irwin took Nettie on her lap, and laid a kindly hand on Ben's curly head as he sat on a stool beside her, and told of his mother's struggle and death, of his fear that Nettie would be taken from him, of the stolen ride, and of finding the summer house; and the lad ended by saying,

"I do wish mother knew."

"I trust, my boy, that you will grow into an earnin', useful man, such as mother would have been very proud of," said Mrs. Irwin.

"I will try hard, ma'am. Indeed I will."

On the following Tuesday, Farmer Jones came to the house with the apples, and was told the story of the stolen ride. The children came and shook hands with him, and the big-hearted man had a suspicious mien in his eyes, as he declared, "It was the best day's business he had ever done."

Toronto.

A BOYS IDEA OF PRAYER.

A little lad was keeping his sheep on Sunday morning. The bells were ringing for service at the church, and the people were going over the fields when the little fellow began to think that he, too, would like to pray to God. But what could he say? for he had never learned any prayer. However, he knelt down and commenced the alphabet, A, B, C, D, and so on to Z. A gentleman happening to pass on the other side of the hedge heard the lad's voice, and, looking through the bushes, saw the little fellow kneeling with folded hands and closed eyes, saying the A, B, C's.

"What are you doing, my little man?" asked the gentleman kindly.

The little lad looked up.

"Please, sir, I was praying."

"But what are you saying your letters for?"

"Why, I don't know any prayer, only I felt in my heart that I wanted God to take care of me and help me to take care of the sheep, so I thought if I said all I knew, he would put it together and spell all that I wanted."

"Bless your heart, my little man, he will! He will. When the heart speaks right, the lips can't say wrong."

The prayer that goes up to heaven must come from the heart.

KEEP A CLEAN MOUTH, BOYS.

A distinguished author says, "I resolved when I was a child never to use a word I could not pronounce before my mother." He kept his resolution, and became a pure-minded, noble, honoured gentleman. His rule and example are worthy of imitation.

Boys readily learn a class of low, vulgar expressions, which are never heard in respectable circles. The utmost care of the parents will scarcely prevent it. Of course, no one thinks of girls as being so much exposed to the peril. We cannot imagine a decent girl using words she would not utter before her father and mother.

Such vulgarity is thought by some boys to be "smart," "the next thing to swearing," and "not so wicked," but it is a habit which leads to profanity and fills the mind with evil thoughts. It vulgarizes and degrades the soul, and prepares the way for many of the gross and fearful sins which now corrupt society.—The Christian.