



A CHRISTMAS FIRESIDE.

BETTER THAN GOLD.

'I suppose you have heard the news,' said Mrs. Howard, as she settled herself for an afternoon chat in Mrs. Snow's cozy sitting room.

Mrs. Howard was one of those bright, social women, who know every lady's business, and, always the first to hear, was active in being the first to tell the news. She knew well enough before she came in, that poor, tired Mrs. Snow had not heard what she had to tell, and so hardly waiting for the quiet word of encouragement from Mrs. Snow, she began her story.

'Yes, Mrs. Grant's oldest son George has come home—the one who has been in the West so long. And it is all true what they say about his great wealth and the rich woman he has married. They are all over there at the old home. A great day for the old folks, I should think, after all their years of grinding poverty, to have such riches come into the family. While he was so hard at work out West, of course he could hardly be expected to think much about his family here; but now he is ready to settle down, I should think he would do something nice for them.'

'I do hope he will,' Mrs. Snow eagerly replied. 'He might do a great deal to help them, and yet I suppose his father would not be happy away from the old place, so there could not be any great change.'

'No, there seems to be no other way than for Abel to keep on in the old way. It is simply out of the question to think of Aunt Sarah living with anyone else, or the old man either, for that matter. I am sorry for Abel. He has had to give up everything for them—property, education, and even marriage. We all know he and Lena Drew would have married long ago, but he could not take her there to live. Poor fellow! It must be hard for him to see George with all his prosperity, and he having nothing.' Mrs. Howard sighed sympathetically, as she contrasted the lot of the two brothers.

'I should hardly say Abel had nothing,' quietly answered Mrs. Snow. 'There is something that is better than gold, you know.'

Mrs. Howard looked inquiringly at her. She often said, 'Mrs. Snow has such peculiar notions, I never knew how to take her.'

As she waited for an explanation, Mrs. Snow softly repeated: "'The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.'"

'I often think that Abel has had the trial of his faith, and has stood the test nobly. There is not even a little child in town that does not love and trust him. It shines out in his face, and even now we can see how grand is his faith. Some day we shall see more clearly than we possibly can now, how precious it is—even "more precious than gold.'"

'Oh, yes,' answered Mrs. Howard, a little impatiently, 'we all know how good Abel is, but I do not think a little more gold and a little less disappointment would hurt him in the least. I think such things should be more evenly divided in this world. I cannot see why George should have all the good times and Abel all the hard, if he has grown strong in faith under it all.'

'But do you think George had no hardships to face in his search for gold in the wild West?' asked Mrs. Snow.

'Why, of course not, Mrs. Snow. I have heard a great deal about the dangers and privations of the mining camps. I suppose it was very rough, and almost as much as his life was worth to live as he did, but he has his gold to show for it.'

'So he has,' Mrs. Snow answered, 'and that is all. It still seems to me that Abel is the gainer. I need not ask you which of the brothers you would rather your son would imitate. In those noble qualities which mark the true Christian manhood, Abel is far ahead. He has the true riches that last forever. You think the trials and dangers of the life in the West are well repaid by the money gained. Then why is not Abel more richly repaid, when you must admit he has not suffered in many ways nearly as much as George, and yet he has that which the Bible tells us is better than gold?'

'If gold is worth so much—worth the

very best days of a man's life, amid every danger imaginable, what must that which is better than the finest gold be worth? It seems to me not quite the thing for a Christian to bestow so much admiration on the man who has gained a little of worldly riches and honor, that there is nothing but pity left for his noble brother.

'No one thinks of pitying George for leaving everything to search for gold, why, then, pity Abel who gave up everything for that which is better than gold? Let us be more consistent with our profession.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Howard, as she rose to leave, 'if all the world thought as you do there would soon be a different state of things. Everybody then would go about watching for all the hard things to do.'

'And so there would be few very hard things for anyone,' added Mrs. Snow, 'and the millennium would dawn.'—*Michigan Advocate.*

WHY FRED DID NOT GO TOBOGGANNING.

(By the Rev. Edward A. Rand.)

Fred Morgan was opening the store in which Tompkins & Company sold so many drygoods. He had started up the fires, swept and dusted, and hung out the well-known placard, 'Goods at Very Reasonable Prices.' Then he went to the rear of the store, and made a thorough inspection of the shelves, to see if the goods thereon were in rows true and even; that the boxes of handkerchiefs on the counter were in order; that a long row of stockings on a line hung down straight as all well-behaved stockings do in every store.

All the while Fred had been busily, seriously thinking. When he reached the door, he looked across the street to this ambitious advertisement of toboggans: 'Have you bought your toboggan for the grand slide Tuesday night?'

'That Toboggan affair! Well, I don't know,' mused Fred. 'I—I—really am undecided. I—I—well, let me think it over.' He went back to the rear of the store, and took up another march of duties that led him down to the front door again, and he was still thinking. Once more he sharply eyed the toboggans. He murmured, 'Freeman Jones' father has a fine lot on hand, and I—I—no, sir!'

That monosyllable 'No' he uttered emphatically as if he meant both letters of it.

'No,' he said again, 'I am not going tobogganing Tuesday night. Tobogganing is all right in its place, but there is something else I ought to do Tuesday night, and I am going to do it. I am going to meeting.'

This all meant that Fred had been very seriously thinking for a number of days that he ought to do his duty and decide to be a Christian, and after the meeting, Tuesday night, the pastor said he would gladly meet and talk with any who had made up their minds to serve God.

'I suppose Freeman Jones will have out his toboggan and wonder where I am, but I can't help it,' reflected Fred. 'I am going to attend to something else first. I wonder who will go to the meeting, Tuesday night! I wonder if grandmother will go! I have heard mother say that grandmother was one who for long, long years had thought she ought to be a Christian, but somehow she could not seem to get where she really would take that step. Of course, Freeman Jones won't go to the meeting, and he may laugh at me, Wednesday morning. I can't help it, though. It is time for me to settle this thing, and I am going to settle it.'

The meeting Tuesday night was a rather slim thing, judged by its size. The pastor, though, tried to speak encouragingly, and to keep his heart up in the right place he urged everybody to be decided to follow the Saviour now, but his heart began to sink rapidly like the mercury of the thermometer in a cold wave, for at a second meeting appointed for anyone who wished to talk with him, he did not see a single soul stopping.

'It is awful chilly here,' he murmured. Feeling half frozen, he rose from his seat in the desk, and was putting on

his coat to go home, when he spied a boy down in the front settee hidden from him by the desk. It was Fred Morgan. It took a lot of decision to stay when he was the only one.

'I am going to stay, though,' said Fred, and he gripped the seat with both hands.

He had made up his mind not to leave the place, but to hold on, if he could get anything to hold on to, and he gripped the seat. And what a good time he and the minister had, talking about the Saviour, about loving him now, praying to Him now, serving Him now. Why do you put off loving this dear Saviour? Do we put off loving father and mother?

The pastor got so much interested, so warm over the matter, that his overcoat soon came off.

And whose footstep was soon heard behind him?

If there wasn't Grandmother Morgan! She had gone off, but soon came back.

'I couldn't help it,' she whispered to the pastor. 'I saw that dear creature stoppin', and he was so decided, and I thought p'raps that was what I have been wantin' these years, just to be decided, and I hope I've made up my mind now. Yes, it is what I've wanted.'

She was right. It is what most people need more than anything else, decision.

Oh, what a beautiful time that after-meeting was! the Saviour was very nigh. He laid His tender hands on Fred, on Grandmother Morgan, and on the faithful pastor.

And what better days in the church followed that meeting!

You have seen a warm mist come softly into the white, snow-covered valley, and how the ice would be set to melting and the brooks be set to running, and green patches of verdure be uncovered, and lo, as you listened, the song of a bird would break out in the hushed, waiting forests. That was the blessing coming to many hearts, the old ice breaking up, the forces of life stirring, and God's birds singing.

And Freeman Jones? What about Freeman? He did not laugh at Fred, Wednesday morning.

'I missed you at the slide last night,' he said to Fred.

'Well, Freeman, I'll go with you sometime, but I thought last night I ought to go to meeting, and I stopped after it.'

'You did? Well, Fred, that is where you're right. I've been a thinking of it a lot, and next time I'll join you.'

Freeman kept his word, and God's birds sang in his heart, too.—*Watchman.*

THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM.

(By E. S. Lorenz.)

'They saw the young child with Mary his mother and fell down and worshipped him.'—*Matt. 2: 11.*

'Would I had been at Bethlehem

That happy morn of old,

To bend adoring there with them
Who offer'd gifts and gold!

If such a joy had then been thine,

With costly gems to part,

Have you offer'd upon his shrine,

That royal gift, your heart?

Have you brought to the Babe of Bethlehem
One star to adorn his diadem?

'Would I had dwelt at Bethlehem

When all the inns were fill'd;

My lowly roof had shelter'd them,

My heart with gladness thrill'd!

Then do you hear when Jesus calls,

'Open to me your door?'

Have you shelter'd within your walls

His hungry, homeless poor;

Have you sought for some wand'ring soul to
gem

The crown of the Babe of Bethlehem?

'How blest to offer rest and food

To his sweet mother mild;

To kneel beside the manger rude

And watch the holy child!

Still there are friendless children left

To cherish for his sake;

There are mothers forlorn, bereft

Our comfort to partake;

Let us help and protection give to them
For love of the Babe of Bethlehem.