

He had not the slightest intention of going home. How could he bear the expense and loss of time entailed in such a long voyage? His Christmas must be passed where he had spent the year—in the surveyor's camp.

And so Frances' letter lay in his pocket neglected,—year, and forgotten,—till one evening two days before Christmas. Again he perused the awkwardly written lines in amusement, but now they awakened different feelings. His parents, Margaret, his sister's prayer to the Divine Child, soon to be born into the world,—all these things were contrasted with his hard life of exploring and surveying unsettled lands. A strange longing entered his heart to be back again with those he loved, to re-visit his old home and taste once more its Christmas joys.

Thus it happened that two days after, late on Christmas Eve, the train coming into Ottawa brought Fred to his native city. It was shortly before midnight when he reached the parish church. For Fred was a good boy and a practical Catholic before all else. He considered a careful regard for his religious duties a primary requisite in meriting God's blessing upon his life. In spite of some few slight drawbacks, he felt how many favors he had need to be thankful for. And the readiness of his service on this occasion had its own reward. Holy mass and communion at the unusual hour, the message of God's minister, the peaceful faces of fervent worshippers, everything in fact to the very lights and the singing had the effect of awakening in his mind the true spirit that should reign on this festival—the spirit of thankfulness that Christ the Saviour was born into the world, that the Son of God, by making His own, our joys as well as our sorrow, sanctified all that is connected with the Christian home and family life.

The singing had ceased, the crowds had departed, darkness again pervaded the sacred edifice except where the lamps glimmered about the crib of the Divine Child, when Fred left church and strolled down the street. His old home was still lighted up. The inmates had just returned from midnight mass. He was tempted to ring,—but no, he would avoid seeing them till morning that both they and he might have some rest.

Next day preparations in the Moran home were well under way for the Christmas dinner, to which Margaret was invited at the wish of Frances.

"I have received no word from Fred," said Mr. Moran, as he took some letters from his pocket. "All the others have written, although none of them can come this year. We would have a lonely Christmas indeed, if Frances and Miss Rowan were not here.