

BESSIE'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

(Written for The Owl.)



CHARITY has its reward—yes; even in this world. The selfish may inspire fear, the rich purchase respect, but only the charitable command love. Do you doubt me? Well, here is a story that will convince you.

John Fawcett, a rich banker, lived in the outskirts of a large western city with his wife and two daughters, Bessie and Julia. Bessie was a plain, almost a homely, girl; but she had large, dreamy eyes that bespoke a sympathetic nature, and a heart filled to the brim with kindness and affection. Many a little, shivering waif smiled on her as she passed, and many a suffering wretch prayed for her and fairly loved the ground on which she walked. Yes; among the poor of that great, big noisy city, Bessie had many lovers, and more than one heart beat faster at her coming, and more than one care-worn face brightened up when she approached. And well they might, for who was a better friend to them than Bessie? It was her joy to do good deeds, and it was the only joy she asked. She cared nothing for the usual resorts of pleasure, where people go to dance or see a play, and pay false compliments to each other. Bessie was not that kind of a girl.

How different was bright, dashing heartless Julia! She was pretty—yes; even beautiful. Bright, flashing eyes, dark, wavy hair, an exquisite form, and graceful, sprightly movements made of Julia Fawcett what the world is pleased to call a beauty. And now I am at a loss to go on, for how can I tell you that this beautiful casket enclosed a small round stone instead of a heart, and that this beautiful girl was cold, selfish and uncharitable? But if you have a little patience the story will tell you all.

It was Christmas eve. The air was clear and crisp, and a jolly troop of bright little snow flakes were playing tag among the leafless branches of the tall trees that grew in front of banker Fawcett's mansion on Princeton Avenue. Now and then, a little wanderer would steal away from its

companions, float over the gate, and tap at the window beside which Bessie Fawcett sat, as though anxious for her to come forth from the cosey parlor and join in their sport. But Bessie paid no heed to them. She was busy with pencil and paper, figuring away as industriously as her father's accountant had ever done. On the table, in front of her, was a roll of crisp, new bank bills, her Christmas present from her father. For months, Bessie had been counting on the joy this accustomed present would bring to the many poor families she could help along with it. For upwards of an hour, she worked on without ever raising her head. She was making a list of the things she would buy and the addresses of the poor persons to whom she would have them sent. Suddenly, however, her work was interrupted by Julia, who tripped lightly into the room, singing the quaint old ditty:

"Now Christmas is come,
Let us beat up the drum,
And call all the neighbors together;
And when they appear
Let us make such a cheer,
As will keep out the wind and the weather."

"Well, well," she broke off suddenly, what are you at now, old maid Moll. But I needn't ask; I ought to know it is some work for your precious paupers. What an idea you must have of life, Bess? Why don't you spruce up, go into society and break some fellow's heart. I know lots of uglier girls than you who do it."

"Nonsense" Bessie replied, "I don't think of such frivolous things. Besides, I hardly think it becoming to a young lady."

"Oh, ho! what an idea you have of the young lady of 'the period.' I assure you, it is quite 'the thing.' But I see you are not pleased. Well, to be pleasant, let us talk about the poor-house. By the way, how is Jack Denham's mother? I believe you have been taking care of her since Jack went away, and old man Denham died and left her in poverty. Wonder how Jack will like it when he comes back and finds out that his estimable papa died a pauper, and that he must live one?"