

**The Best of Christmas Gifts.**

"Was Christmas night. The tree was bare—  
The lights burned low, the rooms were still—  
The children clustered round my chair—  
Guests from the great house on the hill.  
But Orphan Elsie stood apart,  
And watched them with a swelling heart.  
"What did the Christ-child bring to you?"  
I asked of handsome, fair-haired Fred,  
Who cried with laughing eyes of blue,  
"A bicycle, a ball, a sled!"  
But Orphan Elsie spoke no word,  
Keen listening, like a bright-eyed bird.  
"And you?" I questioned Gabrielle,  
"A tea-set and a Paris doll!"  
She answered, clear voiced as a bell,  
"And now, she laughed, she asked little Nell!"  
But silent still young Elsie stood,  
And pulled the ribbons of her hood.  
"Well, baby Oliver," I cried,  
"What did you get? (your turn has come),"  
"A box of tandy!" he replied,  
"A workin' boyse and a dum!"  
"But what," I asked, "my precious pet!"  
"Oh! what did Orphan Elsie get?"  
At last, at last, the children threw  
Their glances on the silent maid.  
"What did the Christ-child bring to you?"  
They questioned softly half afraid.  
"Himself," she answered clear and loud,  
And every child's head was bowed.  
Then, while her old eyes shone like glass  
Wharson a thousand sunbeams met,  
"This morning at the day-break Mass,  
I made my first Communion sweet!"  
The Babe of Bethlehem was born  
Within my soul this Christmas morn!"  
Tears glist'ning in their tender eyes,  
The children sprang to her embrace—  
Like cherubs fresh from Paradise.  
They kiss her hands, her blushing face,  
"Orphan Elsie, how they call!"  
"Yours is the grandest gift of all!"  
—Eleanor C. Donnelly, in the Messenger.

**PATSY'S CHRISTMAS.**

Margaret M. Donovan in the Rosary Magazine.

It was the day before Christmas, and very, very cold. As the knowing ones had predicted, this was to be an ideal Christmas, with its snow-covered ground, to which Nature had not been impartial, having clothed every possible object with a garb of fairest white in honor of her Master and King, whose birthday she would so soon celebrate. Then with her magic wand she turned her gentle zephyrs into a prancing breeze that polished her pond and river mirrors, and kissing the cheeks of her loving children sent the blush of health to every face.

As a direct gift from the Most High, each heart was thrilled with a strange unusual joy, which yearned to find expression in little gifts of love, thus fully commemorating the great festival that would dawn with the morrow's sun.

It was about 4 o'clock, and a crowd of shoppers were surging through the stores on one of the principal streets of a large city.

On the street everyone seemed laden with bundles; the women and children smiling and happy as they thought of the pleasant surprise in store for the dear ones at home, and men who declared "they would rather go to Jericho than carry a bundle," were transformed, as it were, into a veritable Santa Claus, and instead of dodging down any of the back streets, were proud, it seemed, to be carried along by the happy throng, and when an acquaintance happened along they were really pleased to meet him, and with heads held high—"I wish you a merry Christmas, wish you a merry Christmas!" was the salutation on every side.

On the corner of the street, near the store of one of the largest dealers in Christmas novelties, stood a little boy looking at the toys displayed in one of the windows.

One glance at the torn coat, old cap several sizes too large, bare hands and almost bare feet, would convince you that he was an unconscious victim of poverty.

People had seemed too busy to buy papers to-day, and the poor child, discouraged at trying to catch the glance of even his regular customers, gave up the task, and with a saddened heart stood looking at what he didn't even dare to wish for.

Another newsboy soon came along, and seeing him gazing so intently at the pretty things, blurted out: "Say, Patsy, what's yer doin'—wishin' yer was a slight o' hand performer? Say! guess business was bad all round to-day; but you ain't onto their game; never take out so many papers Christmas Eve, 'cause people don't care 'bout what's goin' on, 'ther only thinkin' 'bout themselves." His attention now being riveted on the contents of the window, "Some dandy things in there, ain't they? I wish I could have that gun, what'd you like?"

"Well, I don't know," he replied; "the thought had not entered his mind—'but I do think I'd like that picture book; see the little baby and its mother, and all the cows; somehow it looks like a barn, and I guess they're poor, and maybe they'd like me."

The other looked at him with wide-open eyes, while the expression on his face was one of mingled surprise and disappointment.

"Well, you beat all the kids I ever saw."

Just then the crowd was told to move on, and being separated by the jostle that followed, each started for home.

On the way to his dreary home, poor little Patsy could hardly keep from crying. He seemed to feel very strange to-night.

Until recently he had lived with his grandmother in a room of one of the poorest houses in the dirtiest part of the city.

all gone, and as he had not sold his papers, his very heart strings seemed to snap in twain. Throwing himself on his bed, he wept as he had never wept before.

"Granny, O Granny!" he cried, "I'm all alone down here; what will I do?"

After he had satisfied his aching heart with this burst of grief, the parting words of his grandmother seemed floating through his mind.

"Remember, my child, that you will never be any poorer than the little Infant Jesus. He was born in a manger, and loved to be with those that are poor. He dies, my dear, for you and me, and raising the crucifix attached to her rosary beads, reverently kissed the simple remainder of our loving Saviour, as with an effort she suppressed the sob that would arise.

As the child bent to imitate her, she laid her hand tenderly on his head, and raising her eyes to Heaven said:

"May God bless you, my child, and share with you the love of His holy Mother. Take these beads; they are all I have, but they have been the comfort of my life; keep them until your dying day, and remember that while you are faithful to the Rosary, the world may go against you, but God will be always near. I will soon be leaving you, dear, but in Him you have the best of fathers, and I'm sure our Blessed Lady will always be a mother to you."

As she was well prepared for her final journey, our dear Lord having come to her a few hours before by one of the Fathers, she closed her eyes on this world with all its misery, only to open them on the shore of eternal life.

This scene and many others passed through his mind, and sitting up, he wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his coat, and going to the table drawer, took out the old beads and began to look them over.

"Granny used to say that anything I'd ask my Father in Heaven for, He'd give it to me," he mused. The old candle had now burned low, and as the room began to darken, he knew that soon he would be unable to see, so kissing the crucifix, decided to say his prayers and go to bed.

"Perhaps God wouldn't let it get so lonesome," he thought. "I guess I'll say the Rosary to-night. I can't say it like her, but I'll do the best I can."

Knelling down and blessing himself, he said: "It's awful lonesome down here, Father; I wish you'd take me up there with Granny. People don't like me now, 'cause I don't belong to nobody. I heard some of the little fellers as live in nice houses sayin' how they was goin' to hang up their stockings, and that Mr. Santa Claus was comin' round and bring nice things. I wish I knew him, 'praps he'd bring me that book I saw in the window, and a pair of mittens, and—jesse, what else: one of those boxes what has a little feller in it, pops out his head every little while; there's lots of things I'd like to have, but—" Just then a gust of wind swept through the old room, which was now quite dark; the fire had gone out, and as he looked around, he said: "I guess I'll go to bed now, God, but I'll hang up my stockin', and if it wouldn't be too much trouble, won't you please put somethin' in it; course I don't know what you have for little fellers up there, but 'praps the little Jesus will pick out somethin' nice for me."

As he had dropped a bead after every few words, he concluded that as he had gone through them all, his Rosary was said. And who knows but what his simple prayer was a chapter of the most perfect roses, as it is not so much the words we say, as the faith with which they are uttered!

After saying devoutly his regular night-prayers, he blessed himself, and arose from his knees. Taking off one of the old stockings, he hung it on the corner of the shelf, and placing the rosary beads around his neck, laid him down, and as the wind howled through the cracks, the sad day went through his mind: the happy throng, the unsold papers, the bitter thought of being hungry and alone, and with a sigh he buried his face in his little arm, and cried himself to sleep.

It was Christmas Eve, and the home of Doctor Greene was ablaze with lights. Inside all was warm and bright, and as the family gathered around the tea table, it was a pretty sight. Dr. and Mrs. Greene were a young couple, and with their only child, a boy of twelve, lived very happily.

The doctor's sister, a young lady noted for her many fine qualities, was spending the holidays with her brother, and with Leo and his mother had been shopping the early part of the afternoon. Each one had a secret, and not until the morrow were they to let it be known. For months each had been busy trying to think of something that would surprise the others, and to-night every mind was at ease.

As was customary with the family, they were to approach the Holy Table on Christmas morning, to receive the Author of all this natural and supernatural happiness.

As the ladies and Leo had been to confession the latter part of the afternoon, about an hour after supper the doctor started for the church.

Doctor Greene had some fine gifts for each one of his family, among which was a double runner for his son, a pair of skates, a set of his favorite author's books, and other large articles, so as his wife helped him on with his coat, she whispered something in his ear, and on his way home from church he stepped in to buy some of the small articles, just to fill up the stocking, as she had said.

Among the few who had prolonged their thanksgiving that morning was he coming out of the store when

he heard a scream, saw the crowd gather, and then a pale-faced girl caught his arm and cried: "O Doctor Greene, help him!" He recognized her at once as the daughter of one of his poor patients, an old man who was subject to sudden sick spells.

The poor girl, after working hard all day, thought it would cheer his heart to go with her to buy their Christmas dinner, and also the coat which, through her noble self-sacrifice, was to be his Christmas present.

Immediately halting a cab, the doctor, who understood the situation at a glance, assisted both of them in, and before entering himself, ordered the man to drive to their home, one of the worst houses in the slums.

By the aid of simple restoratives he had almost completely recovered by the time they reached home, and after lying on the bed a short while, he was as well as ever.

It had been brought on, the doctor thought, by the unusual excitement; and now that it had passed away, he was quite happy.

After admiring the nice warm quilt, into the pocket of which he had quietly dropped a coin, he wished them a very happy Christmas, and started for home.

As he descended the stairs, he decided, as he had a long walk before him, to light a cigar. Stepping to do so in one of the long entry ways, he thought he heard a moan. Holding the lighted match above his head, he peered into an old room, the door of which was open. Stepping in, he looked around, and the sight made his brave heart ache with pity.

Lying on a bed of rage was a poor child with a rosary bead around his neck, the crucifix held tightly between his fingers, and a tear apparently frozen on the little cheek.

He thought he had seen sad sights, but now he was obliged to wipe away a tear.

Turning to go, he saw the torn stocking hanging on the shelf, and a bright idea struck him.

Taking the toys from his pocket, he soon had the stocking bulging out, and placing it again where it was, with a heart somewhat lighter, started homeward.

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear. The bells were ringing merrily, and while the heavenly hosts with their divinely musical voices made the walls of Paradise ring with their song of praise, the earthly choirs were adding their tribute of love and adoration.

The early Mass was over, and while the majority of the congregation still knelt in silent prayer, others were gazing into the little crib where the Christ Child takes us on the anniversary of His birth, that high and low may find food for the day's meditation.

But few remain now, and among them is little Patsy.

On awakening at the first dawn of day, his eyes turned immediately to the shelf, and there hung his stocking, not empty now, but filled to the brim. Was he awake?

He rubbed his eyes, and looked around the room to see if anything had happened. No, everything else was unchanged. His stocking had been filled, his prayer was answered!

Jumping on his feet, he quickly took it down, and from it took first, a jack-in-the-box—just what he wanted, but could not stop to examine it; a bag of candy, an iron engine, two oranges, a jack-knife, and sure enough, there was the very book he had been looking for.

The poor child was completely overcome, and after looking again and again at each article, and counting them, he dropped on his knees, and if ever a thanksgiving was offered, it came from his lips at that moment.

What matter if he had not a crumb for his breakfast? God had given him a happy Christmas, and what more did he want?

Sitting down on the floor, he began to look at the gaily-colored pictures in the book, but the one that pleased him most was that which represented the Infant Jesus in the manger.

That picture seemed to recall something; what was it?

Granny used to tell him about it, and she took him to see it once.

Dr. Greene and his family. They were about to depart when they observed this little child approach the rail with softened tread, and partly out of curiosity, they remained to see what he would do.

Knelling, as they were, within hearing distance, they were deeply affected by the child's words, and fully realized the fact that the truest hearts can be humbled to the very dust by the examples of unobdubing faith which are found in little children.

The doctor was particularly interested, recognizing as he did, not only the child, but the articles he displayed.

As he turned to go, they met him in the aisle, and in the kindest manner began to question him.

When they found that he had no one to care for him, had not even the means to procure a breakfast, it was with difficulty that they suppressed their feelings.

"So you belong to nobody?" the doctor said, after a smothered sigh.

"Well, how do you think you'd like to live with me? You seem to be just the kind of a little fellow I like."

"Yes, dear," added his wife, whose mother's heart yearned to bestow on him that affection of which he was deprived, "I will try to make you truly happy."

The poor child looked from one to the other, while his little face was a perfect study as he tried to solve what seemed a great mystery.

The doctor's sister, who was very wealthy, declared she would give all she possessed to win the love of that dear little child.

Leo actually threw his arms around him, and hugged him for very joy, and Patsy, who was somewhat bewildered by the sudden demonstration, returned the embrace with an affectionate squeeze, and as though to prove his thankfulness, he went around, and raising his little wan face, lovingly kissed each one, while his eyes spoke what his tongue could not tell.

To their home he went with them, and an hour later you would hardly recognize him. After having a warm bath and a suit of Leo's clothes placed on him, he was really a fine looking child, in every feature of whose face there seemed to shine the seed of a noble character.

Each one of the family seemed eager to wait on him, and left nothing undone to fill his cup of happiness, which already seemed overflowing.

As Leo and he went on a tour of inspection through the house, every inch of which he tried to convince him was a part of his belongings, the doctor's sister had occasion to remark: "There is no use in talking, John, you must let me have him. The dear child has completely won me. No change need be made, as I intend to make my home with you for the future."

The doctor had to give way, as usual, to the little lady, and it was decided that he would remain the brother of Leo, between whom a mutual affection had sprung, the only difference being, that the doctor allowed her this means of diminishing her bank account.

While the Christmas gifts were being displayed, gay was the cheer, and merry the laughter, but when the doctor had occasion to remark: "There is no use in talking, John, you must let me have him. The dear child has completely won me. No change need be made, as I intend to make my home with you for the future."

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**THE VICE OF SCANDAL.**

It is too bad that Catholic laymen and women do not realize the important mission God has confided to them in the workings of His Church among men. How much they can and ought to do, not only for the salvation of their fellow-Catholics, but for those outside the Church, is a fact seldom considered. Yet this is the truth: Catholic people by their good example, owing to the peculiar and daily opportunities thrown in their way, can bring back to the practice of faith not only negligent Catholics, but also many honest Protestants whom a priest could never reach.

Now, Catholic people, God has given you a great and precious gift when He blessed you with a divine faith, and it is a gift for which you will some day have to render an account. It is true you are not called upon to go out on the streets and proclaim before the public the faith that is in you, to boast of your Catholicity; but you are obliged to confess before all men, by your example, by the modesty of your conduct, by the purity of your speech, by your honesty in business, by your charity to the poor, by your respect and reverence for God and things holy, that you belong, body and soul, to a faith that teaches uprightiness of life and abhors iniquity. This the confession which many Catholics in our day fail to make, and by their failure bring discredit upon the religion of Christ, disgrace upon the Church, and ruin upon their own souls.

You do not realize your own power to influence others. See what advantages you possess. You have a religion that is an infallible guide. You have principles founded on that faith which will always direct you in the right path. You have the examples of the heroic lives of the saints to encourage you, and the advice and counsel of earnest bishops and priests to instruct and assist you. Where others are weak you are strong, strengthened with the sacramental grace, with a faith that is divine.

But the great folly with many Catholics is this, that they fancy their only work on earth is to look out for themselves, enjoy life to the full, and then by some miracle of God's mercy scramble into heaven as best they can. Let every man take care of himself, is a false and heathen maxim, and one unworthy of a Christian to whom God has freely given the faith.

Besides this, while there are many who do not confess the faith openly and honestly, who by their want of uprightness fail to make the influence of their faith affect those about them, there is still another class who may be said to actually deny their faith. That sounds strange to your Catholic hearts, but thank God there are few who squarely and openly deny their faith, and such a denial is usually preceded by a total rejection of nearly all the commandments.

But there are many who practically deny it, many who turn a deaf ear to its moral teaching, many to whom the faith is a kind of problem, an hypothesis true enough in theory but too exacting in practice. They are the Catholics who rarely approach the sacraments; they are the Catholics who feel no remorse at missing Mass; they are the Catholics who make light of religious observances, the people who, when they come together, aping the manners and the swagger of the worldly-minded, consider it a smart thing to boast of and joke about how careless and how indifferent they are to the practices of their faith. This is particularly a mean and cowardly fault in some young people who, while believing in their hearts, converse and act as if they did not believe. Your faith is too precious a treasure to be treated lightly, and the things connected with it are too sacred not to prize it highly. Your calling as Catholics demands that you should first cherish it yourselves and then make its influence felt by others.—Sacred Heart Review.

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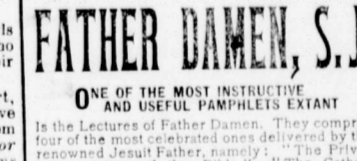
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