

BOYS AND GIRLS



CHRISTMAS MORNING,

—'Frank Leslie's Magazine.'

The Fitzgeralds' Christmas.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

Josephine and Elizabeth Seymour had been saving up their pennies for a long time; and when their mother said they might open their bank, they were very glad—partly because they wondered how much there was in it, and partly because there were so many nice ways to spend pennies, and they were tired of saving.

It was the week before Christmas; and the contents of the bank were to be spent for some poor little children that Santa Clause couldn't find. That was their mother's idea, and Josephine and Elizabeth were delighted with it; and for weeks past, the thought of these children had helped them to deny themselves candy when the temptation was strongest.

Their eyes were very bright now as the money rolled out in Josephine's lap; ever so many pennies with now and then a nickel among them. A dollar and sixty cents they counted; and if you have ever saved money yourself, you will understand how much that seemed to the two little girls.

'Now, what shall we buy for the poor children, mamma?' they asked, eagerly.

'In the first place,' said their mother, 'we must find the children. I don't know of any that I am sure will have no Christmas; but I will go out this afternoon and see if I can't find some.'

'Can we go too?' cried the little girls.

Mrs. Seymour hesitated a moment. 'I am afraid not,' she said; 'for, you see, I can't be sure just where I may have to go, nor how far I may have to walk. But I will tell you all about it when I come home, and you shall go with me to-morrow to buy the presents.'

With that Josephine and Elizabeth had to be satisfied, and all the afternoon, while their mother was out, they talked and wondered about what kind of poor little children she would find, and how many presents their dollar and sixty cents would buy.

When Mrs. Seymour came home it had grown dark, and the streets were lighted; and she had been gone so long, and looked so tired, that it was really just as well that she had not taken the little girls with her.

When she had laid aside her wraps, and all three were seated cosily around the fire-

place, she told them where she had been, and what she had found.

'First,' said she, 'I went to see the poor family we sent the flour to the other day, you know—where the father went away and left them, and the baby died. But the newspapers told everybody about them; so they have had plenty of help; and the children are asked to a Christmas tree. Then I remembered an Irish family that a neighbor of mine told me about. She said the father drank, and they were very poor; and, sometimes, in winter, the children had no shoes; but the mother would never ask for anything, and was too proud to let anyone know how poor they were. I was rather afraid to go there, dreading that, being a stranger, I might say something to hurt the mother's feelings. So I first whispered a prayer that God would help me to know how to speak to her. For when people are very poor, and in trouble, you have to be more careful and gentle with them than with those who are rich and happy.'

Here the little girls looked very serious, and Josephine nodded her head as if she understood.

'The name of the woman,' continued Mrs. Seymour, 'was Mrs. Timothy Fitzgerald, and I found that she lived in a little, one-story, frame house, way out on Straight street. She kept me waiting some time after I had knocked, before she opened the door, and she had evidently just tied on a clean apron, and combed her hair, too; for she had stuck the comb in her back hair and forgotten to take it out.'

'Is this Mrs. Fitzgerald?' I asked, as politely as I could.

'Yes, ma'am; will you walk in?' Then, as I accepted the invitation: 'Take a seat, ma'am; it's a cold day, ma'am.'

There was a cradle in the room, with a baby in it, and a little girl near, who looked at me shyly at first, peeping at me from behind her mother's skirts; but by-and-bye she grew less timid, and came near enough to stroke my furs, calling them 'Kitty,' and stick her dingy little hands into my muff; for neither they nor the room were very clean.

'Mrs. Fitzgerald and I had quite a visit before I dared say anything about Christmas; and we found that her sister used to wash for my mother when she was a little girl; so, of course, that made us feel like old friends. And then we began to talk about the hard times, and how many children she had; and I said I thought perhaps they wouldn't feel like doing much for Christmas this year. And (poor thing!) she tried to tell me what fine presents their father always bought them; but, finally she agreed with me that it might be better if, this year, he spent his money for shoes and things they really needed. And I told her about my little girls saving their pennies, and how glad they would be to spend them for her children; and then she choked up a little, and the tears came to her eyes, and she said:

'God bless their dear little hearts, ma'am!'

'And when I thought of my two little girls, with their happy home and kind father to do everything for them, and then of those poor, neglected little things, half-clad and half-fed; why, I had to wipe my eyes, too. Then I asked her to write on a