

The Northwest Review.

"AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM."

VOL. I.

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1885.

NO. 18.

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A CHRISTMAS FIRESIDE MUSING.

BY FATHER RYAN.

I'm sitting in my silent room
This long December night,
Watching the fire-flame fill the gloom
With many a picture bright.
Ah! how the fire can paint!
His magic skill how strange!
How every spark
On the canvas dark
Draws figures and forms so quaint!
And how the pictures change!
In a moment how they smile!
And in less than a little while,
In the twinkling of an eye,
Like the gleam of summer sky,
The beaming smiles all die.

From gay to grave, from grave to gay,
The faces change in the shadows gray;
And, just as I wonder who are they,
Over them all
Like a funeral pall,
The folds of the shadows drop and fall,
And the charm is gone,
And every one
Of the pictures fade away.

Ah! the fire within my grate
Hath more than Raphael's power,
Is more than Raphael's peer,
More than he in a year,
And the pictures hanging round me here
This holy Christmas eve
No artist's pencil create,
No painter's art conceive.
Ah! those cheerful faces
Wearing youthful graces
I gaze on them until I seem
Half-awake and half in a dream.

There are brows without a mark,
Features without a shade,
There are eyes without a tear,
There are lips unused to sigh.
Ah, never mind! you soon shall die.
All those faces soon shall fade,
Fade into the dreary dark,
Like their pictures hanging here.

Lo! those tearful faces,
Bearing Ages' traces!
I gaze on them, and they on me,
Until I feel a sorrow steal
Through my heart so dearly;
There are faces furrowed deep;
There are eyes that used to weep;
There are brows beneath a cloud;
There are hearts that wait to sleep.

Never mind; the shadows creep
From the death land; and a shroud,
Tenderly as a mother's arm,
Soon shall shield the wind from harm;
Soon shall wrap its robe of rest
Round each sorrow-haunted breast.
Ah! that face of Mother's
Sister's too, and brother's,
And so many others,
Dear in every name,
And wherever they are to-night, I know
They look the very same
As in their picture here.

This night, to memory dear,
And painted by the flames,
With tomb-stones in the background,
And shadow for their frames.

And thus, with my pictures only,
And the fancies they unweave,
Alone, and yet not lonely,
I keep my Christmas eve.

I'm sitting alone in my fire-lit room;
But no, the fire is dying,
And the weary voice of wind in the outer gloom
Are sad, and I hear them sighing.
The wind has a voice to pine
Plaintive, and pensive, and low.
Hath it a heart, like mine or thine?
Knoweth it weal or woe?

How it walls in a ghost-like strain,
Just against that wind from the past!
As if it were tired of its long, cold flight,
An' wanted to rest with me to-night.
Cease, night winds cease,
Why should you be sad?

This is a night of joy and peace,
And Heaven and earth are glad!
But still the wind's voice grieves,
Perchance, o'er the fallen leaves
When, in summer bloom,
Danced to the music of bird and breeze,
But, torn from the arms of the parent trees,
Lie now in their wintry tomb.
Mute types of man's own doom.
And thus with the night winds only,
Alone, and yet not lonely,
I keep my Christmas eve.

HOW TO HAVE A HAPPY CHRISTMAS

"HAPPY CHRISTMAS to you, friend Moreton!" cheerily exclaimed Mr. Mc Worthy overtaking his friend, and slapping him on the shoulder with the familiarity of old acquaintance.

"Good-morning, Mac," replied Mr. Moreton, grasping the proffered hand. "You look as if it was 'happy Christmas' sure enough with 'you,' at any rate."

And so he did, for his face was all lit up with a ruddy glow, which showed how blithely his blood was bounding under the influence of his active morning walk, and of the dry, cold December wind that was whistling along the snowy pavements, while every feature was radiant with a smile of exuberant contentment and good humor.

"To be sure it is happy Christmas with me," said he, taking his friend by the arm and hurrying him into a quicker step, "and I'd like to know what else it should be with any man? Isn't it happy Christmas with you, old friend?"

"Well, no, Mac, I can't exactly say it is," replied Mr. Moreton. And then, as if anxious to evade the subject: "But where are you coming from, so early in the morning?"

"Why, I've just been to early Mass and received my Christmas communion, and now I'm hurrying home to breakfast. And where are you going, if it is a fair question?"

"Well, I thought I'd step down to the store a minute. I had to leave rather early yesterday evening, and I want to see whether anxiety to get their Christmas jollifications hasn't made my scatter-brained clerks neglect a matter of importance that I told them to attend to."

"Going to the store on Christmas morning!" exclaimed Mr. Mac. "Who ever heard of such a thing! Now, look here, my dear Moreton, do let me use the privilege of an old friend, and ask you what you meant when you said just now that Christmas wasn't exactly

happy Christmas with you."

"Well, no, Mac," he replied, "it isn't. To tell you the truth, Christmas day always gives me the blues. You need n't look so astonished—it is a fact; and I'll tell you why. Of course, there was a time when I looked on Christmas day as most other people seem to do. When I was a little fellow, I suppose I used to dream about it for weeks ahead, with its glorious visions of sweet things, and toys, and fire-crackers—the Fourth of July wasn't a circumstance to it. Then, when I grew up, its social gatherings and home enjoyments made it a day of real happiness to me. But, as I became older, the sugar-coating wore off, and now the whole thing seems so empty, and I can feel so little sympathy with all this bustle of enjoyment, that positively it gives me the blues to have to see it. There at home, now, I've just left my family in the height of their Christmas merriment. I didn't wish to throw a cloud over it with my gloomy face; and, to tell you the truth, that is more than half the reason why I started out for my counting-room. May be I've grown too cynical; but I can't help it. It's just as I've told you." And he struck his walking-stick heavily on the sidewalk three or four times, as if he would gladly pound to death the mirthfulness that annoyed him.

"Why, my dear Moreton!" exclaimed Mr. Mac, "you do indeed astonish me, and pain me too. This is so unlike what I should expect from my dear friend on Christmas morning. There must be a screw loose somewhere. Surely this sweetest festival of the year ought to be enough to gladden any heart that has a spark of religion in it. Why, man alive! just to think that it is our blessed Saviour's birthday—and to hear the big-toned church bells telling us so—and to listen to the organ at early mass pealing forth the Gloria in Excelsis, which the angels sang on Christmas morning—and to hear the priest repeating in us their joyous salutation: 'Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for this day is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.' I ask you, is this not enough to thaw out any heart that is not ice itself?"

"Surely, Mac, it ought to be, and I wish it could thaw mine; but it don't."

"Have you ever given it a chance?"

"Well, probably not as fair a one as I ought. To be candid with you, Mac, there is the whole trouble; my religion has always been more in my head than in my heart; I have always been ready to defend my faith, but remiss in practicing the religious duties it enjoins; and of course not practising its duties, I have not been animated with its spirit, and so its festivals find my poor heart in no condition to share in their sanctifying and consoling influences. I see it all clearly enough; but how can it be otherwise with all the business worry and family cares that I have to engross my thoughts? And now, while we are on the subject, let me ask you plainly, Mac, how you, having similar cares to engage you, have still managed to keep up the good spirit so well?"

"Well now, friend Moreton," said he, "I don't wish to seem as though I were preaching you a sermon, but as you have asked a plain question, I'll try to give a plain answer. I didn't begin life with the principal that my worldly duties must necessarily interfere with my religious duties, and I have never found it necessary to adopt it. I started with two good resolutions: first, that, as I am God's creature, and not my own or the world's, my duties to God should always go before every other consideration; secondly, that as an absolutely necessary means of keeping this resolution, I would always be faithful to my religion, and regular in receiving the sacraments. I have always tried to stick to them. Of course, I have all along found plenty of obstacles, and many a time, when the day would come for receiving the sacraments, some other attraction, or an annoyance or care of some kind, would come athwart my good resolution to throw me off the track; but I had determined that my duties to God must go first, and thanks be to God, I have found that "where there's a will, there's a way." So I go on quietly, and I must say I don't find it very hard. In fact, friend Moreton, I can't help feeling certain that any man can live up to his religion if he only tries in earnest, and that, if he does, he will need no stretch of imagination or enthusiasm to taste the sweetness of religion, to enter with gusto into the spirit of its festivals, and so, when Christmas morning comes round, to feel that it is happy Christmas in earnest. Eh! friend Moreton, now don't you believe so yourself?"

"Ah you rogue!" he said laughingly. "You want to catch me and make me condemn myself. Still, I suppose I must own up yes. But let me ask you to make me understand a little better than I do now the meaning of that expression you use, 'the spirit of the festivals.' I must acknowledge my notions are more indistinct than they ought to be about such things. And then you'll tell me what the spirit of Christmas is."

"Why," said Mr. Mac, "hardly able to conceal his astonishment at his friend's unusual interest in such a subject, and

barely managing to overcome the embarrassment which he could not help feeling at finding himself moralizing so seriously. "Why it means simply this: Every festival comes to teach us a particular lesson, brings with it a special grace to help us to learn and profit by that lesson, and has attached to it a special blessing from Almighty God for those who shall have tried to do so. This is what is meant by the spirit of a festival. Then, to look forward to a coming festival as being in this way a season of instruction and grace, and to endeavor to attune one's soul to the lesson it comes to teach, and to pray for the grace it brings that we may benefit by its influence—this, you see, is what is meant by entering into the spirit of the festivals. So they pass by and pass again, year after year, benefitting every soul that cares to be benefitted by them, and leaving a new blessing from Almighty God with every soul that was willing to receive it."

"Come now, Mac!" interrupted Mr. Moreton, in a matter-of-fact way as he could assume. "That is all very nice; but don't you think there is more fancy than reality in it?"

"No, I don't, you provoking fellow!" retorted Mr. Mac, "and I know you don't either. You know just as well as I do that our blessed Lord intended his life to be our model, as he says himself, 'I have given you an example, that as I have done so also you may do.' You know without my telling you that every mystery of his life is full of instruction for us, and must bring grace to help us to profit by it and that it is according to the guidance of the spirit of God that the church brings these mysteries before us in the various festivals of the year. I'm sure you are not a deist, and if you are not you must know that all this is true. Eh, old fellow, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Well, well," he replied, with pretended pettishness, "I suppose I must let you have your own way about it. But go on, and let us hear about the spirit of Christmas."

"That is easily understood," said Mr. Mac, resuming the line of thought which his friend's pretended incredulity had interrupted. "The spirit of Christmas flows from the lesson taught us by our infant Saviour in his birth. To know what the lesson is, I have only take a little peep into the poor stable of Bethlehem, and every feature of the scene speaks it loudly enough. Whew!" he exclaimed, as the wintry blast came rushing down the street they were just then crossing, "how the wind is sporting itself this morning! I wonder if it blew so cold and fierce around the poor stable on that first Christmas night. Ah! yes," he continued with real emotion, "I've no doubt it did; for good kind Lord was pleased always to take the worst and bitterest for his portion. Yes, as I was saying, every circumstance of our Saviour's birth teaches me a lesson. The poor stable itself, so strange a palace for the King of kings; the manger with its bed of straw, and its little Baby occupant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and weeping the tears of infantile weakness; the poor young mother, bending over her Babe to screen him from the blast, and mingling her tears with his; good, simple-hearted St. Joseph, and the lowly shepherds, kneeling or standing around in wondering awe—all these are like so many great voices that speak to me of humility and self-denial, and detachment of heart from the world's goods, warning me at the same time how important must be the lesson which the Son of God has taken such pains to teach us, and coaxing me to the love of the good God who has loved his poor creatures with so touchingly tender a love. Friend Moreton, when I think of all this, I could not if I would, resist its influence. For the life of me, I couldn't help taking the lesson to myself, and trying in my own poor way to put it in practice; and, small though the result may be, yet the mere effort makes me feel like a better and happier man. The effort to imitate our Saviour's humility gives me more peace of mind, by helping me to be tranquil and cheerful under things that would otherwise torture my wounded pride; and, far from depressing me, makes me stronger and more resolute, by causing me to lean more on God's strength and less on my own weakness. The effort at detachment from the world's goods gives me a more confident trust in divine Providence, enables me to look with comparative calmness on reverses which would otherwise worry me to death, and gives a real stimulus to my industry, by making me esteem money not for its own sake, but for the sake of the good I can do with it; not as a means for my own selfish aggrandizement, but as a treasure which Providence puts in my hands, that I may use it for the good ends which Providence sends in my way, and as enabling me to prove the sincerity of my compassion for our infant Saviour's poverty, by relieving the poor whom he has declared to be his representatives. Then, too, when I try to animate all that with love for our loving God, I can't tell you the buoyancy and freedom of spirit it gives me. My Christmas communion, which I would not miss for the world, becomes a real feast with our in-

fant Saviour himself; and when I leave the Church, I feel as if I did indeed carry with me a blessing from his own and his Mother's hand. How in the world, then, could I feel otherwise than happy on Christmas morning? But, gracious me!" he exclaimed, remarking in his friend's pensive air and softened features the effect which the simple eloquence of his own warm feelings had produced, "see how I've been running on, preaching away at you, and 'blowing my own horn too' too! Fred Moreton forgive my thoughtlessness!"

"God bless you for it my dear Mac!" replied Mr. Moreton with genuine feeling. "God knows it would be well for me if I heard more and thought more of the same kind. If I did, I shouldn't feel as I felt this morning. But may be it isn't too late yet."

"Too late! My dear Mr. Moreton, it is never too late for such a heart and such a will as yours. Just try it, and I'm sure, when this day next year comes round, you won't feel like growling at your old friend for wishing you a happy Christmas."

Taking his friend's hand for a parting shake—for they had reached the corner where Mr. Mac turned off to his home—and looking full in his face he thought he saw something like tell-tale moisture glistening in his eyes. Glad to escape further risk of his own emotions, with a squeeze of the hand that spoke more than volumes, he darted round the corner, and in a few moments was in the bosom of his family, spreading around him the same happiness whose he had just planted in his friend's heart.

Mr. Moreton meanwhile continued his walk. He looked thoughtful and abstracted. Every now and then he punched the snow heaps with his stick, as if angry at the emotion caused in him by the conversation, and anxious to get rid of it. But he could not shake it off. He thought he would not go to the store this morning after all. Turning another way he soon found himself amid a stream of persons all going in one direction. Almost unconsciously he followed the tide, and, in a minute more found himself in St. Patrick's Church where second Mass was just beginning. Dropping mechanically into the nearest pew, he knelt motionless; but his brain was working hard and fast! The Mass went on but he felt as if in a maze. He had a vague consciousness of rising to his feet with the rest of the congregation at the "Gospel," and then of hearing the priest saying something that sounded very much like what Mac had just been saying, and the thoughts crowded faster still. The "Offertory" began, and from the transept gallery the sweet voices of more than a hundred orphan girls floated out in the touching strains of the "Adeste Fideles." He could stand it no longer; he broke right down, and, after a convulsive quiver or two through his strong frame, wept the first genuine tears that his eyes had known for many a day.

The little bell in the sanctuary tinkled at the "Sanctus," and then at the "Consecration," and again at the "Domine, non sum dignus," and then there was a movement among the congregation that aroused him. Lifting his face from his hands, in which it had been buried, he saw the crowds advancing to the communion-rail. He felt very lonely. But the die was cast. Then and there he resolved that he would be ready to receive holy communion on the following Sunday, and the resolution made him calmer.

Mass was over. The congregation dispersed, save those remaining for their thanksgiving after communion; and still he was on his knees, his lips saying nothing but his heart a great deal. At length he arose. As he passed out, he saw a poor woman kneeling near the door, an infant in her arms, and shivering with the cold that crept through her scanty clothing. He thought of the Mother and the Child shivering in the stable. He slipped a dollar into her hand, "Here, buy something for your Christmas dinner," and left her wondering at the unusually large alms. The outside air felt breeding. Passing his hand across his forehead two or three times, he sat his hat firmly on his head, and started homeward.

Things wore a new face that day. Somehow or other the noisy merriment on the streets did not annoy him as it used to, the young folks at home remarked how much more pleasant than usual was; Mrs. Moreton wondered what good news he could have heard upon the street; he went with them all to High Mass and Vespers; at the dinner table he was the life of the party; and when he lay down that night, with the events of the morning still fresh in his mind, he felt that he had at last learned how to have a happy Christmas.

He kept his resolution. The following Sunday he received holy communion. The two friends met frequently, feeling more friends than ever, and often reverting with grateful pleasure to "that Christmas morning walk." Twelve months passed, and Mr. Moreton received his Christmas communion kneeling at friend Mac's side. He never let the ice grow over his heart again.

Kind reader, do you use the same
(Continued on Fifth Page)