

His Holiday Best

(By Sydney Dayre, in 'Presbyterian Banner'.)

'You're doing your best, George?'

'Oh, yes, uncle. I—suppose so.'

'Your very best?' Uncle Harvey, led by a doubtful tone in the boy's voice, put the question searchingly.

'Why, I don't know exactly what you would call best, Uncle Harvey. I was hired to do certain work, and I do it. Of course, I shall be careful not to do more,' with a little laugh.

'Don't be too careful about that, my boy,' said the other, gently.

'Why, you wouldn't have me do more than I engage to, would you, uncle?'

'I would have you do more, rather than less. I would have an employee always looking after the interests of his employer.'

George gave a grunt of discontent.

'That doesn't go in these days, uncle. I heard you and father talk of times when a fellow by good, faithful work might rise to something in a business way. But that isn't so now. I'm just one among one hundred others in the great tread-mill of work.'

'Well—I turn off here to take my train. Here, my boy, a little bit of Christmas—I wish I could multiply it by ten.'

George's face shone as the kindly hand put into his a ten-dollar gold piece.

'Oh, uncle!' fervently. 'You don't know how far this will go. How good you are!'

'Good-by, my dear fellow. Don't forget that the putting of your very best self into every thing you do is sure to pay in the long run.'

Towards evening on that day the head of the department in which George was employed called for the attention of the clerks. The business was conducted on a humane principle, and no undue demand was ever made on the employees.

'We have just learned that a belated lot of goods has come in. They have been in a slight accident, and are more or less damaged. As this department is closed for the evening, you were not expected to work, but we are now obliged to ask some of the force to remain, in order to get the goods into order for sale, as the fancy goods' clerks will have a busy evening of it. It is not compulsory; we are calling for volunteers.'

And this Christmas eve! There was a breathless pause. Then one and another spoke.

'I can't give up my evening at home,' said George to himself. 'What would mother and the girls think?'

But with his overcoat in hand there flashed over him the words his uncle had spoken in the morning. They had more than once occurred to him during the day, and he had wisely resolved within himself that this holiday season was a good time for the beginning of the practice of new resolutions.

'I'll come,' he notified those in charge. Then he turned his face homeward with a mind divided between the hardship of telling of an evening of work and the pleasure of showing his uncle's gift. How large it would look in the eyes of those to whom money now came so hard, so much harder than had ever been anticipated in fairer times.

'I believe I'll spend this money now, so as to be sure of it.'

But a wiser thought prevailed. The money should be spent with careful consideration of

the needs and fancies of each member of the family. No one but mother could lay an exact finger on those.

How mother brightened at sight of the generous coin.

'Yes, it will make Christmas for us, dear,' she said. 'Nothing for Christmas otherwise, for your pay, dear, must go for the coal, and Emily's for the rent.'

There was a half hour of delightful consultation between mother and son on the spending of the gift, during which George made an exact list of articles selected by her.

Emily, the oldest daughter, came in by the time the list was carefully folded in mother's pocket.

'Why, it seems to me you haven't your Christmas face on, Emily,' said George.

'No, I haven't,' she said, with a suspicion of tears in her voice. 'I left it behind me at the moment they told me in the office that—'

'Not that you're discharged?' interjected mother, with an alarmed face.

'No, not quite so bad as that,' said Emily. 'Only that we were not, as is the custom in your place, George, to be paid on Christmas eve, but have to wait for the end of the week, as usual.'

A chorus of distress arose.

'Too bad! Too bad!'

'Some employers have no human blood in them,' said George, angrily.

'I promised that those bills should be paid to-night, if possible,' said mother, in a tone of dismay.

'Mother, you don't mean—' began George.

'I'm afraid I do, dear. A promise is a promise.'

'But that promise was based on the supposition that we would get our pay to-night.'

'It meant that they would be paid with the first money we could get.'

George told of the gift of their uncle, and a wail went up from the two younger children.

'Come, come,' said George, always loyally upholding his mother. 'This family is a unit in agreeing to do what has to be done. Don't let's make mother feel as though she had to bear the brunt of it all.'

'No, no; we can stand it to do without—as we often have before,' quickly assented Emily. 'And we're going to have a nice Christmas eve all together, and forget all about our money.'

Here was George's trial. He wished now that he had told before, but there had seemed no moment when he could.

'I have to go out to-night, folkses,' he said, with a brisk attempt at cheerful indifference. 'George!'

Explanation followed, but there was little further attempt at a holiday atmosphere.

'Did I do wrong to offer it?' he asked.

'No, dear said mother, as with a sigh she quietly dropped the Christmas list in the fire.

Mother went out a little way with him to pay the bills.

'I hate to see all the fun and the brightness and the good times,' said George, bitterly, as they walked along the brilliant streets.

'Oh, no, you don't,' said mother, soothingly. 'You'd be sorry not to see good times at Christmas.'

'No,' said George, 'not when we have no share in them.'

'We have our share, dear. We have a

right to a share in all the gladness of the Lord's coming, if only we will take it.'

The hum of happy voices on the street was accentuated as, having bid his mother good evening, he turned into his place of business. The light and warmth and the cheer were catching, especially if one could look upon them as being evidences of the love which seeks the glory and beauty of the Lord's birthday in showing love for others.

'After all, mother is right. The happiness of our Christmas ought not to depend on a few knickknacks. I'll do better by mother to-morrow. She'll be like a queen, as she always is—trying to make us all happy, no matter how heavy her own heart may be—and I'll stand by her bravely in it.'

He cast a glance of sympathy at the clerks into whose regular line of duty came this Christmas Eve work, finding a glow of satisfaction in reflecting that he was doing work by request—that he was in very truth regarding his uncle's admonition, to do more than his whole duty. Into the boy's heart as he went on came a very sincere and earnest resolve.

'It feels good to do it. I'm going to keep it up, whenever the chance offers.'

There was some fun about it—the big packing cases being brought in conditions of more or less damage, the searching into them for 'all sorts' in the way of notions and fancy goods. It required a long evening's work to get through them, at the end of which time George turned his attention to a number of articles he had carefully laid aside. His heart beat a little faster. If it came out all right the question of Christmas gifts, such a sore, sad one, so difficult to regard with the equanimity which he had determined to bring to it, would be most triumphantly settled.

As the head of the department passed, he called his attention to the things.

'They were among the slightly damaged goods. If your price for them would not be too high, I should like to take them, if I may pay for them next week?'

'Take them and welcome,' said the other, 'they are worth nothing to us. And,' he raised his voice so that it might be heard by the small force of volunteer workers, 'go to the office and get your pay for extra work.'

It had not been expected. George's heart, as he went home with his burden, was light with the feeling that he and his were to be sharers in all the happiness of the gracious day.

All were asleep as he stole quietly in, and he had full opportunity to arrange his gifts according to his fancy.

'And they are all such things as we never could think of buying. Not useful things,' he thought, with fine scorn.

'Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!'

'The best day in the world to you, mother darling!'

The greetings were given with studied warmth, yet under all lay heavy the feeling that there was a sad lack of real holiday flavor.

'Don't open the parlor door yet, George. The house is so cold.'

But George persisted in opening the door, until Emily turned in half-impatient remonstrance. One of the little girls had caught sight of a table inside, and was uttering a wild scream of delight.

Special Clubbing offer World Wide + Nor Messenger. .. \$1.00