

## \* \* The Story Page. \* \*

## "Inasmuch"

BY MRS. HARRIET A. CHREVER.

Mr. Wendell Walpole had enjoyed a dainty, bountiful supper, and emerging from the warmth of his handsomely furnished dining-room, he buttoned closely about him his heavy overcoat preparatory to going out. It was bitterly cold, but in view of his many mercies, Mr. Walpole, who was a professor of religion, found it his bounden duty to be present at the evening meeting for prayer. He had asked his wife to accompany him, but as usual she refused. Very placid and grateful he felt on entering the comfortable vestry; if any sorrow haunted his life it was in the back round tonight, and he mentally resolved that his pastor should not wait in vain to hear his voice in prayer that evening at least. The goodness of the Lord had followed him in a signal manner through the year, whose fast-fleeting months had brought again "the harvest time, Thanksgiving." Next week would come the annual festival, and although all anniversary days were saddened for Mr. Walpole and his wife, yet the ledgers at the counting-room showed profits, which made the heart of the business man rejoice.

Mr. Walpole's muffled figure paced slowly up the aisle until, nearing the platform, he seated himself with unconscious self-satisfaction and complacency near the sacred desk. The door of the well lighted vestry kept opening and shutting, admitting warmly clad figures; ladies enveloped in plenty of velvet and fur, and gentleman in heavy coats, doubly lined and double breasted, and well reinforced at the collar and cuffs. The church was in a populous, fashionable locality, and if the numbers who attended its evening meetings attested anything as to its spiritual warmth and life, the pastor need not have wanted for encouragement in his blessed work. At last, when old Capt. Bertram, clad in an enormous camel cloak, had slowly lumbered into the soothing atmosphere of the vestry, a little, half-starved thing, clothed in a few garments evidently intended for a still smaller boy than himself, had managed to glide in under the concealing folds of the wide-sweeping cloak. The sexton espied him after a moment, crouching in a corner of the settee nearest the great radiator, but the child was perfectly quiet, and the man hadn't the heart to motion him out. He reflected that had he seen the little arab entering, he might perhaps have prevented him from stopping, but evidently the light and shelter had attracted him, for it was unusually cold for the middle of November.

The meeting was a more than ordinarily live one, and in due time Mr. Walpole arose, and in well-chosen language dwelt eloquently on the goodness of God. Surely his children should trust implicitly so bountiful a provider. The mercies had followed each other in such regular succession during the year, they had been literally new every morning, and fresh every evening. Then he asked, with great earnestness, "What shall we render to our God for all his benefits? I, for one, my brethren, intend to make such returns as will seem well pleasing in the sight of the Lord. It is our duty"—taking on a more generalizing, less personal style—"to copy the example of our blessed Saviour, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, warm the poor and assist the needy, always remembering the words of divine acceptance and approval, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'" Inspired by his own fervid words, his enthusiasm had arisen to such a pitch that he felt drawn to supplement his remarks by a hearty prayer, in which he begged to be shown in what way he could best attest to the real thanksgiving with which his heart was filled. He concluded the prayer by urging that at last he might hear from his Master's lips the welcome plaudit, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me."

Remarks followed from others present, and in more than one instance allusion was made to "the earnest words of our dear brother Walpole." There was considerable hand-shaking and interchange of friendly inquiry as the meeting broke up, but at length Mr. Walpole had again closely buttoned his coat to his chin, and was briskly walking towards home when he thought he heard a slight call. He half turned, but seeing no one, still in that exalted frame of mind he paced on until he felt a decided little pull at his coat. He turned way around this time, and stopped short at sight of a little figure close by him in the cold moonlight. But before he had time to say a word, a little, thin, wiry voice asked eagerly:

"Say, boss, did you mean that, wot you said?"

"Did I mean what?" asked the tall man, in surprise.

"Did you mean that wot you said just now in the church, the beautiful, warm church?"

"Why, what do you mean, boy?"

Any practical or even possible connection between his happily uttered remarks and this pinched little atom of

humanity never occurred to Mr. Walpole's mind for a moment.

"I mean that wot you said 'bout you must feed folks wot are hungry, and buy clothes for them as hadn't got any, and warm folks as was freezin'; we're almost freezin', sister an' I, an' Jinny's sick—awful sick she is."

"Well, don't you have a doctor?"

They were walking side by side, the piteously incongruous pair, for it was too cold to linger on the glistening pavement. Mr. Walpole wished his fragile companion would run away, but the little, illy-shod feet managed somehow to keep up with his own long stride.

"Yes; we's had the doctor, but he don't stop Jinny a coughin'."

"Well, I'll give you some pennies; then you'd better run home and get warm."

"We ain't got no coal, and the wood's most gone, and Jinny's that sick she can't pray out loud no more. I wouldn't a-axed you," he added, in a dreary, patient tone; "for Jinny an' me ain't the beggin' kind, only you talked so good and grand in the big, warm church," then he half sobbed, in a kind of desperate outburst, "an' I'll be blessed if I didn't think you meant it!"

Mr. Walpole walked a little more slowly, as after a moment he answered in a queer, suppressed voice:

"Come in my house, little boy, and I'll see what I can do for you."

As they stood by the furnace register in the spacious front hall Mr. Walpole inquired:

"How long has your sister been sick?"

The child's eyes wandered from the bronze figure holding the gas lamp to the tufted-like paper on the wall, then down to the softly carpeted floor, as he answered softly: "Jinny ain't never been well, she ain't, not sence I can remember. She worked hard to fetch me up decent, but now her cough's that bad she can't get out any more, and can't talk only in a whisper."

"What doctor do you have?"

"Dr. Stangood; he's been to see Jinny lots o' times."

"Well, I know Dr. Stangood," said Mr. Walpole, encouragingly. "I'll speak to him about your sister. Let's see, what is your name, and where do you live?"

"My name's Lou Witter, and I live down to No. 55 Scott's Court, up three flight an' turn to the left."

"Don't you know, my boy, there are societies who help people like you and your sister? I belong to such a society myself. I should be sorry to know of a truly worthy person's suffering."

The boy's face worked itself into a wicked little grin, as he answered, with shrewd logic way beyond his years. "I earns more spendin' the same time runnin' errands for pennies, than I get a-answerin' o' their questions. I gets a pint o' coal, or a dish o' soup after I've told who my granny was, an' where she lived, an' who she took in washin' for. I don't like s'cieties, nor Jinny don't neither. You see, we don't know any too partic'lar just who our folks was, nor what parish we belongs to, nor what church we's members of. We mostly don't go to church, but Jinny always went reg'lar to the Mission Sunday School long's she could, an' up to the time she got so hoarse, she kept a-singing 'The Lord will provide'; I wish to gracious he would!" But the thin little voice was not passionate, nor consciously irreverent, only so longing, poor hungry child—so longing.

Just then Mrs. Walpole, hearing voices, looked from the library door into the hall, and with a glance at the strangely matched pair, was about to return to her easy chair, when her husband said: "Wife, if I send this child to the kitchen can't the girls give him something to eat? we must have some food to spare for—one of our Master's poor little ones."

Mrs. Walpole replied rather indifferently, but not unkindly, that of course there was food down stairs the child was welcome to. She had the air of a person too much absorbed with personal cares or troubles to think of extending much aid or sympathy to others, but she noticed her husband accompanied the little waif to the kitchen.

When the boy went out of the basement door he had food enough to last himself and sister for at least two days, and a bundle of coal beside. Mr. Walpole feared the child's little strength might be taxed too much by two such packages, but he bore out the load right manfully, trying to conceal his efforts, and all the time thanking his benefactor in his crude, untutted way. "I thought as how you meant it boss. I'll try and be a good Christian myself, if ever I get onto my feet. Good night, boss, and thanks again."

After Mr. Walpole had told his wife all there was to tell, she asked:

"What shall you do about it?"

"I shall see Stangood in the morning, first thing, just as I promised too."

"You see, Mr. Walpole," said Dr. Stangood, the city physician, "the fact is the girl is dying for want of proper food and shelter. She is only one of scores of cases

which no special charity can reach. She ought to go to the hospital but she won't leave her little brother; and it is simply amazing what the child does for her. He manages somehow to pick up fuel enough to keep her from actually freezing, and food enough to keep her from actually starving. Astonishing how these poor creatures cling to each other, but there! they have hearts as well as the rest of us. Wish I could help them all, but that would be impossible. Good-morning sir." And the doctor hurried into his buggy and away.

Alone in his office Mr. Wendell Walpole was facing a serious problem. He had gone well-fed, and in all the flush of worldly prosperity into the house and presence of his God, told what he meant to do in view of unnumbered mercies received, and sought divine aid in carrying out his generous impulses. And God had taken him at his word, and at once brought before him one of his neediest children. Should he dare look back after voluntarily putting his hand to the plough, even if it took his time and money, and forced his feet into the unwonted by-ways to answer the call? He answered with commendable honesty:

"Verily, if I do, I am not fit for the kingdom of God!"

At noon he was laboriously climbing three flights of stairs in a rickety old house in Scott's Court. He paused on reaching the upper landing, but just then a door opened and he saw the face of the boy he had befriended the night before.

"Oh, its the boss! he exclaimed, excitedly. "Walk right in sir."

On a pile of clothing, answering for bed-stead, bed-clothes and all, was a once fair young girl. Tears sprang to Mr. Walpole's eyes at sight of so girlish but wasted a face. At the end of an hour he groped his way down the uneven stairs and out into the sunshine. The next day Virginia Witter went willingly to the hospital, knowing provision would be made for her little brother's welfare. He was to be comfortably clothed, and act as errand boy at Mr. Walpole's office.

It had been distasteful enough at first, for a man of Mr. Wendell Walpole's dainty habits, picking his way through the foulness of Scott's Court, but he regarded the Lord's call, and after all, he was in earnest, and meant what he said the night of the prayer meeting, although he did not realize the meaning of his fervid words. Alas! how often we lack realization of the import of our petitions. But no life is so prosperous that naught of ill beclouds it, and despite his wealth and fine worldly prospects a great cankering sorrow was always present in the heart of Wendell Walpole. Years before there had been an only son in the rich man's house. Very fond and very proud had been the parents of their bright, handsome boy. Alas! too proud and too indulgent. By the time the youth had fairly passed childhood's years he had become so utterly unruly that he was expelled finally from school. His parents tried to tighten the lines when restraint was no longer possible. Then his irregular habits, added to his insatiable demands for money—the money was not as plentiful then as now,—tried his father almost beyond endurance. There were repeated altercations; the father would remonstrate, the son threaten. At length, after a few years, there was an attempt one night to rob the safe in Mr. Walpole's office, and to escape detection the guilty son fled—whither? In pain and humiliation the father sought his recalcitrant son far and near. But years had gone by, and although they failed to bring desired relief, the sharp anguish of the loss had assuaged in some degree, and the father and mother mourned their only son as dead.

It became a real satisfaction to Mr. Walpole to inquire day after day, and to find that through his prompt, kindly aid, Jinny Witter was slowly gaining. He had never dreamed before how blessed it was to engage in personal deeds of charity, and he now resolved, instead of sending the usual amount for Thanksgiving to the Local Relief Society, to send but half the sum to them, then to add generously to the other half, and disburse the gift himself.

Jinny and Lou Witter had told piteous stories of other sufferers in Scott's Court, and somehow Mr. Walpole began to sympathize, with something akin to joy, his visits to a poor, lame, old woman, who once had a "bunny boy" to care for her, but he died and left her a pensioner on the bounty of others. In vain he tried to induce his wife to find a panacea for her sorrow in seeing wan faces light up at her welcome approach; but the poor lady refused, and pined on, never knowing the comfort she missed.

Jinny Witter had entered the hospital just before Thanksgiving, and Mr. Walpole called her, in his heart, his "Thanksgiving offering," so literally had he felt the service done her to be an offering from his heart to God. In a few weeks she had rallied to such a degree that it became a pleasure to assist the nurses in various light ways. Then her voice returned so that she could even sing a little. So gentle and sweet was the frail girl! the