



A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

## TINY JIM'S WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS.

BY A. B. DOBBS.

He was so very small for his age that the other boys who lived in the same dreary court had put the prefix to his name, and now wherever he was known, it was as 'Tiny Jim.'

He was lame, too, no one knew exactly how or why, if indeed anybody thought about it.

You see, his mother had died when he was only three years old, and his father's grief had been so terrible that, forgetful of his old mother, whose heart was wrapped up in him, her only child, and forgetful of the frail little son, who looked so like his dead wife, he had fled the old home and gone to sea, whence the tidings of his death four Christmases ago had found their way to the dismal attic where the old woman and the little boy dragged out a forlorn existence.

So it was that, as Jim said himself, he had 'no nobody' belonging to him except the wretched old grandmother, whom want and misery had driven to the fatal glass and with whose neglect he was content because it so rarely gave way to anything better.

To-night, however, I doubt if a happier heart beat in all Dublin than that of Tiny Jim. It was Christmas Eve, and this was the very first Christmas he had ever known anything about. There was only one little bit of a drawback to his perfect gladness. I'll tell you what it was. On the previous Sunday the superintendent of the Ragged Mission had given an invitation to every boy and girl present to a feast and Christmas tree at the Hall on Christmas day; and in addition each child had received permission to bring one or even two friends with them to share the glorious feast. Herein lay the cause of Tiny Jim's anxiety.

'Plaze, yer honor,' he had called out, 'I haven't got nobody to bring. I haven't got no friends, yer honor, cause I can't play.' And he glanced significantly at the rickety crutches that lay beside him.

The superintendent's voice was not quite steady as he replied, 'Don't you worry,

Tiny Jim, but just ask the dear God to send you a Christmas guest, and He will.'

So Jim had smiled his quaint little old-fashioned smile and been satisfied.

But here was Christmas Eve, and the guest had not come. But then he had a nice thought. 'It ain't so mighty late,' he said to himself. 'I've a good mind to step out an' see if there's any trace of the Star o' Bethlehem. I wouldn't be wan bit surprised if God lighted it agin jes' to show me where to look for me Christmas friend.'

So down he hobbled into the dreary street. At first he could see nothing but wind-driven clouds rushing across the sky, but as he stepped further out into the court he almost shouted aloud, for there, sure enough, was one big, beautiful star, which as the lighter clouds floated across it, looked just as if it were really moving, as did that long-ago star for the wise men. He looked at it long and earnestly, making mental calculations as to its position, then, with a deep breath, he returned to the doorstep.

'Jes' as shure as ye live,' said he to himself, 'it's straight as a die over our own house.'

He dragged himself wearily upstairs again, and then because the attic was cold and there was nothing else to do, he crept into the little box of rag-covered straw that constituted his bed, and wondered, and wondered who his guest could be. Once the startled thought came to him, 'Could Granny be his Christmas guest?' But he put the suggestion away from him at once. 'God could niver ha' meant her,' he said to himself; 'it 'ud spile all if Granny came.' Yet down in his heart of hearts Tiny Jim knew that it was poor, hungry, miserable Granny and no other whom God meant him to invite to the Christmas feast at the mission, for had not the Star of Bethlehem stood right over their attic?

It was not a pleasant thought to have come to him, and he turned from it, and because he could not sleep for the throbbing of his knee, he passed the time in going over all the beautiful things that he had to look forward to. The party on the morrow was first, of course. Then he considered what a comfort it was that Granny had not come in 'angry drunk' to-night, so there was no danger of her hiding his

crutches, as she had done more than once when frenzied with drink. This evening she had scarcely spoken, and after their meagre supper had thrown herself upon her poor, hard bed in the corner, where she had lain ever since, with her face to the wall; fast asleep, Jim supposed.

So he counted up all the nice things he could think of upon his cold little fingers and toes. By that time it was close upon midnight, and he was just beginning to think that after all his leg was aching a little worse than usual when the great city clocks slowly struck twelve, and the bells of the old cathedral near by began to play the most exquisite chimes he had ever heard from them before.

They played, 'It came upon a midnight clear,' and many other Christmas songs, but last and loveliest of all they dropped into a slow, sweet melody that Tiny Jim had never heard before. He listened entranced. The bells were singing to him, just to him, and to nobody else in all the crowded city. He did not know that that short, exquisite strain which they played over and over so often, now loud, now soft, was one of the deepest inspirations of Mendelssohn's transcendent 'Elijah,' he only knew that by adding a little note here and omitting one there he could make it fit most of his best-loved hymns, and he sang them over, one after another, to the rich accompaniment of the chimes.

Once he fancied he heard a sob from the corner where Granny lay. It was when he sang:

'Guard the sailors tossing  
On the deep blue sea.'

He loved the sailors for his dimly-remembered father's sake, and the night being stormy, and hearing the roar of the channel waters, mingled with the wind, he had sung the verse over no less than three times. But when he stopped to listen, he thought himself mistaken, for Granny lay with her back to him, as she had lain all night, apparently asleep. How forlorn she looked, the fitful moonbeams playing over her, so old and wretched and hopeless. Tiny Jim's tender heart gave a thump. 'She haven't a sowl to care for her but me,' he thought, 'an' an'—I can't—not much, anyway.' He sighed heavily, and the bells stopped playing and talked to him instead. These were the words they said:

'If you can not love her,  
For her you can pray,  
That God, for the dear Christ's sake,  
May wash her sins a-way.'

Again his heart gave a throb, and with a stifled sob he threw himself upon his pillow. To think that in all these months that he had known God he had never said one word to Him about Granny, poor Granny, who not only had no one to love her, but no one to pray for her. What if she had died?

'Oh, dear God,' he cried, 'don't let her die before you've forgiven her. Make her sorry now, God, an' wash her sowl whiter than snow, an' make her a good girl, for my Jesus' sake. Do it, if ye plaze, dear God. Amen.'

And then, with that strange, half inexplicable tenderness which so often sweeps over our hearts towards those for whom we pray, he slipped out of bed and crossed over to where the aged woman lay.

'Poor Granny,' he whispered, softly touching the sad gray head. Then, as the new love welled up stronger in his heart, 'Dear Granny,' he said, and gently stroked the withered hand that lay nearest to him. Granny did not stir.

'Dear Granny,' he said again, 'you shall come wid me to the Christmas party, an' be me Christmas friend, so ye shall; an' I'll ax God to fix it so the boys won't laugh, and he leant over and kissed the wrinkled brow.

Somewhat to his consternation, Granny opened her eyes and turned them full upon him. He shrank back, but there was a look upon Granny's face, he had never seen there before. She threw aside a corner of the faded coverlet. 'Be yez cowl'd, Jim, honey?' she said.

Tiny Jim's heart swelled almost to bursting. 'Could it be that God was making Granny a good girl already?

'Yes, Granny, I bees mighty cowl'd,' he answered tremblingly.

'Creep into me arms, thin, acushla, an' I'll thry to warm yez, though I bees none too warum meself.'

That was all, but Tiny Jim crept in, and

Granny's arms closed about him. The warmth began to steal through his chilled little frame, the throbbing of his knee ceased, his Star of Bethlehem shone down upon him through the dusty skylight, the bells grew softer and softer, and Tiny Jim was sleeping the sweetest sleep he had known since he lay, a baby, upon his mother's breast.

But Granny lay awake far into the Christmas morning, sometimes moaning, sometimes uttering strange, broken words, as of a half-forgotten prayer. At length she too, slept, and there was joy in the presence of the angels of God on that beautiful birthday of the King.

Tiny Jim was the first to awake. Granny's arms were yet about him, so he had not dreamed it, and Granny's face, lying near his own, was amazingly sweet and peaceful.

But listen now, Tiny Jim, whose is that heavy tread upon the creaking stair? One flight, two flights, three flights, surely not four flights—why, it must be somebody coming to see them. The child springs out of bed, wildly excited. Granny opens her eyes, suddenly wide awake. She, too, hears the step, and starts to her feet, trembling in every limb. Too often had she listened for that same tread in the happy dead past to mistake it now, after six years of silence. Was she turning to stone? She could neither move to open the door nor speak to bid the visitor enter.

He did not wait, however, for his own heart beat almost as wildly as the hearts within. A moment's pause on the threshold, and then the old door fell back upon its hinges and there stood a great bronzed sailor. Such a big sailor, and such a beautiful sailor, Tiny Jim thought, and had no time to think any more, for in a moment he and Granny were clasped in one comprehensive embrace to the broad breast of their Christmas caller.

The story that Tiny Jim's father told was too long to tell here, and after all, the main point which concerns us is the fact that he wasn't drowned after all, but had returned from the dangers of the deep, a changed man.

'Last night,' he concluded, 'there was a powerful say on the channel; we was most afeared we'd niver make the shore, and I so near to yez, too; but quare enough, hard after midnight, the win' d'thropped that suddent as I niver seen it d'throp afore, an' we slipped into harbor like an arrow from a bow.'

'Shure, an father, honey,' said Tiny Jim, with a gay little smile, 'that waz whin I was a singin' of—'

'Guard the sailors tossing  
On the deep blue sea.'

And then, because the sailor's heart was too full for utterance, he fell upon his knees. Granny knelt beside him, and Tiny Jim, with his arms about his father's neck, just whispered above his breath, 'Dear, beautiful God, there's no use thryin' to thank you enough. I love you, I love you, I love you.' And God was content.

Little fear that the boys at the mission feast would laugh at Granny or at Tiny Jim that day. For Jim was carried through the hall by a great, strong sailor, who, at sight of the little crutches, had dashed his hand across his eyes, set them out of sight, and lifted the child to, oh, such a snug and easy resting-place in his powerful arms; and Granny walked beside them, steady and sweet and glad. What a beautiful, perfect time it was. And when Tiny Jim, wearied with the weight of his joys, had fallen asleep upon his father's breast, the big sailor stepped up to the superintendent of the mission and thrusting into his hand a big bunch of crumpled paper money, 'Use it, yer honor,' said he, 'for any little chaps as has been deserted by their father, an' specially, yer honor, if there should happen to be a luno wan among 'em.'

And the superintendent's eyes glistened, as he grasped the great brown hand and answered, 'I surely will.'

So the dusk of the Christmas night fell upon God's fair world, and when the sailor had laid his weary, drowsy little son to rest for the last time in his rude cot in the attic corner, Tiny Jim had murmured sleepily, 'Dear God, I love you, I love you, I love you.'—*Episcopal Recorder.*