

The Inglenook.

By Way of Experiment.

(By Elizabeth H. Miller.)

[Twelve leading Missionary Boards have united this year in a campaign for securing a league Christmas offering to missions. In order to secure a number of stories setting forth the propriety of bringing gifts to Christian Missions at Christmas time they offered prizes amounting to \$100. The following story was awarded the first prize of \$50.]

CHRISTOPHER MORTON, Jr., was looking through the morning mail in the office when there came a knock at the door. He glanced at the clock and frowned. It was too early for visitors by five minutes, and this vigilant young man of business was very careful of his minutes.

While he hesitated the door opened without ceremony and admitted a gaunt, unfashionable figure, hollow-chested and sallow-faced.

"Hello, Christy, old chap!" cried the intruder, stretching out a hearty hand and feeling apparently no doubt of a welcome. "How are you?"

For an instant the other looked at him vaguely, the crease still showing in his forehead. Then his eyes lit.

"Why, Jim Perry, is it you!" he shouted, getting around the table at a bound.

"Part of me," said Jim, sinking into a chair. He panted a little, but he smiled yet.

Christy looked him over discontentedly. "What have you been doing to yourself?" he asked.

"Caught a fever," explained Jim, with a nod. "The missionaries sent me home. I might better have stuck it out there but I had no breath to argue with them, so they packed me off. I am to go back in September."

"I have always believed in foreign missions," said Christy, "but when they took you out of the country I found it hard to keep my faith. And now—" he stopped abruptly.

"It was a mighty good day for me when I went," said Jim Perry. "I have got a lot out of living these past three years."

There was no mistaking the ring in his voice.

"You have snug quarters here," said Perry. "They tell me that you are a prosperous man of affairs."

"I am getting on," said Christy modestly. "I have some turn, I think, for making money."

"We out in China," said Jim, with a chuckle, "haven't any; it is the last thing we can do. Our strong point is spending. We claim that nobody on earth can surpass us in that. We will invest for you if you like. By the way," he plunged his hand into his pocket and brought out a flat strip of cardboard, which he proceeded to fit together into a money box.

"There!" he said, setting it up gravely on the corner of the mantelpiece. "You will kindly contribute."

"What is it?" asked Christy, regarding the small object distrustfully, very much as if it were a dynamite bomb.

"We are trying," explained Jim, "to raise a special Christmas offering for missions. Along with the rest of her Christmas giving the Church is asked to give to those who

have never learned what Christmas is."

There was a slight pause.

"Could anything," Jim asked, "be more acceptable to Him in whose name our festival is kept?"

"The original meaning of Christmas has been overlaid in a good many minds," commented Christy briefly.

"To their loss," said Jim; "and to the bitter loss of many besides."

He rose from his seat and began to pace back and forth over Christy's thick carpet. But he was weak; he soon came back to his old place.

"I have walked," he said musingly, "the swarming streets of heathen cities, I have gone into heathen homes, I have stood face to face with weary, heavy-laden heathen souls, and I have been taught what darkness is. But then, thank God, I have time and again seen the Star of Bethlehem break in the black sky and stand still over some place where the Christ was born, and I know, yes, I know, the brightness of its rising!"

There was another silence.

Again Jim was the first to speak. "No doubt," he said, "you give a number of Christmas presents."

"But I don't begin to think of them in September," said Christy.

"That is fortunate," responded Jim tranquilly. "It will give you more leisure to think of this betimes."

He looked at his watch and said that he must go.

They walked together to the corner where he took the car, and then Christy hurried back to his work.

"That man will never go to China next September," he muttered to himself, as he rang up the elevator. "It will be another celestial Kingdom for which he will start, unless the signs are wrong."

For the rest of the morning Mr. Morton was not so undivided in his attention to business as was customary with him. Many times his mind wandered to the face that was like and so unlike the face of his old college mate. It was aged. It was lined. It was tired.

"But you could trust it," Christy concluded, "to the uttermost."

"Jim Perry," he said, facing at last the crucial idea, which he had sought to evade, "has got much out of life. What am I getting?"

The roar of the city came in at the open windows. Christy did not hear.

"If I should die to-night,—that is too trite a supposition. If I should have softening of the brain tonight or advancing paralysis, what satisfaction would there be to which I could hold fast, as I sat with my face to the wall while life passed me by?"

The breeze fluttered the papers on his desk.

"If my plan stopped now, nothing would be left from the failure. They need the future in order to amount to anything. If Jim Perry never gets back to China, why," he leaned his head on his hand and the thought came slowly, "he has lived for an object and attained it as he went along."

Christy was still thinking of the look in Jim's eyes and the sound of his voice when footfalls along the corridor foretold an interruption.

Several men followed on the heels of one

another. When they were all gone, Christy's mind had largely recovered its ordinary temper.

"Jim Perry is an awfully decent chap; it was unsettling to see him looking so done. If he had stayed in this country, three-quarters of a life-time of work would probably be before him. One can't help remembering it. But—I can accept the logic of missions."

He took the little cardboard box from the drawer into which he had thrust it and read every Scripture verse on all its sides.

"Yes, the arguments are strong. I don't pretend to gainsay foreign missions. But yet it can't be denied that thousands of the holiest of saints have lived their lives out within the limits of Christendom and found more than their hands could do with their might. However, that sort of incompatibility between the two sides of a truth is the commonest thing in the world. It does not shake the claim of the missionaries."

"I wonder," he meditated, "how much genuine missionary spirit there is in the church of to-day. I don't mean among the specialists, the experts, like Jim (and me)," Christy had the grace to laugh a little, "but in the rank and file."

He lifted the contribution box and regarded it with a new expression. By and by he smiled broadly.

"It will be an interesting experiment," said Christy. "Let us try it."

He put the box up again on the mantelpiece where Jim had first set it, clearing a space about it that it might stand unshadowed in a small rim of black marble.

Another hour of the afternoon passed as many other hours had done. Christy had returned to his habit of absorption in what was in hand.

An old woman, rich and "crotchety," had been talking business with him for the last fifteen minutes.

"The old dame is keen as a weasel," thought Christy, as he listened with bowed head deferentially. "Not many men could fool her on a deal. She is honest herself and she doesn't mean to be cheated. The most of her time is given to padlocking and double-barring her money chest."

Finally she came to a pause. She pointed across the room.

"You have something new there. What is it?"

"A collection box," answered Christy, accepting his cue promptly. "A college classmate of mine, a missionary to China, left it. The missionaries are calling for a special offering at Christmas."

The old lady heard him out patiently. When he had finished she began to speak of further precautions and provisos that had occurred to her as to her affairs. Then she rose stiffly to go.

At the mantelpiece she stopped, took a bill from her full purse and slipped it into the narrow opening of the missionary box. She had given the first contribution to Jim's heathen.

"Oh her abundance," quoth Christy, as he shut the door behind her.

Miss Craig, his stenographer, was moving at the other end of the office. She shut up her typewriter; it was the hour for her to leave.

A little time before Christy had felt a sensation in regard to Miss Craig. He did not often do this; which was one of his chief virtues.

But just now, in the midst of his discourse on foreign missions, he had been arrested for an instant by meeting the straight, intent gaze of the young woman who always, unless directly addressed, kept her discreet eyes