

SANTA CLAUS IN THE PULPIT.

BY REV. WASHINGTON GLADDEN, IN "ST. NICHOLAS."

(Concluded.)

"Don't be too sure!" cried the preacher. "Things are not always what they seem. Look!"

A new light of strange brilliance now lit up the pictures, and every link of that golden chain was transformed into an iron fetter that fastened a woman's wrist,—a woman's wrist that vainly strove to release from its imprisonment a woman's hand. The chain itself was a great circle of women's hands,—wan, cramped, emaciated, pitiful hands,—each one holding a needle, each one clutching helplessly the empty air. Within this circle suddenly sprang to view a little group—a woman, bending by the dim light of a winter afternoon over a garment in her hands, and two pale children lying near her on a pallet covered with rags, while the scanty furniture of the room betokened the most bitter poverty. It was evident enough that the poor creatures were famishing; the hopeless look on the mother's face, as she plied her needle with fierce and anxious speed, glancing now and then at the sleeping children, was enough to touch the hardest heart; a low murmur of pitiful exclamation ran around the room, and there were tears in many eyes.

"She is only one of them," cried Santa Claus. "There are four hundred just like her, working for the man who bought this necklace for his wife yesterday; it is out of their life-blood that he is coining his gold. And to think that such a man should take the money that he makes in this way to buy a Christmas present. Ugh! What has such a man to do with Christmas?" And the good saint shook his fist and stamped his feet in holy wrath. Then the group faded, leaving what looked like a great blood-stain in its place; but that, in its turn, shortly disappeared, and the white screen waited for another picture.

"I have many pictures that are even more painful than this," said the preacher, "but I am not going to let you see any more of them. I only want you to know how the rewards of iniquity look in the æonian light. There are a few more pictures, less terrible to see, but some of them will be a little unpleasant for some of you, I fear. Here is a basket of fruit; it looks very tempting, at first; but let the true light strike it. There! now you see that it is all decayed and withered. It is really as bitter and disgusting as it now looks. It was given, this morning, by a young man to a politician. The young man wants an office. That was why he made this present. A great many so-called Christmas presents are made for some such reason. Not a particle of love goes with them. They are smeared all over with selfishness. Christmas presents! Bah! Is this the spirit of Christmas?"

"But here is one of a different sort."

A pretty crimson toilet-case now appeared upon the screen.

"Elegant, is it not? Now see how it looks to those who live in the æonian light."

The crimson plush slowly changed to what looked like rather soiled cotton flannel, and the carved ivory to clumsily whittled bass-wood.

"What is the matter with this? I shall not tell you who gave it, nor to whom it was given; it is no real wrong-doing on the part of the giver that makes the gift poor; it is only because the gift represents no effort, no sacrifice, no thoughtful love. In fact, the one who gave it got the money to buy it with from the one who received it. There are a great many Christmas presents of this sort; it isn't best to say any hard words about them; but you see that they are not, really, quite so handsome as they look. Nothing is really beautiful, for a Christmas present, that does not prove a personal affection, and a readiness to express it with painstaking labor and self-denial. Now I'm going to show you another, which will enable you to get the idea."

It was a little picture-frame of cherry-wood rather rudely carved, that now appeared upon the screen.

"The boy who made this for his mother works hard every day in school and carries the evening papers to help with the family expenses; he carved this at night, when he could gain a little time from his lessons, because he couldn't afford the money to

buy anything, and because he thought his mother would be better pleased with something that he himself had made. You think it doesn't amount to much, don't you? Well, now look!"

The transfiguring light flashed upon the screen, and the little cherry frame expanded to a great and richly ornamented frame of rosewood and gold, fit to hang upon the walls of a king's palace; and there, in the space that before was vacant, surrounded by all that beautiful handiwork, was the smiling face of a handsome boy.

The people, old and young, forgot that they were in church and clapped their hands vigorously, Santa Claus himself joining in the applause and moving about the platform with great glee.

"Yes," he cried, "that's the boy, and that's the beauty of this little frame of his; the boy is in it; he put his love into it, he put himself into it, when he made it; and when you see it as it really is, you see him in it. And that's what makes any Christmas present precious, you know; it comes from your heart and life, and it touches the heart and quickens the love of the one to whom it is given."

"And now there is only one thing more that I shall show you, but that is a kind of thing that is common, only too common I'm afraid. It is a present that is all beautiful and good enough till it left the hands of the giver, but was spoiled by the receiver. Here it is."

A silver cup beautifully chased and lined with gold, now came into view.

"A boy whom I know found this in his stocking this morning. He was up bright and early; he pulled the presents out of his stockings rather greedily; he wanted to see whether they had bought for him the things he had been wishing for and hinting about. Some of them were there and some were not; he was almost inclined to scold, but concluded that he might better hold his tongue. But this boy had made no presents at all. He is one of the sort that takes all he can get, but never gives anything. That is what Christmas means to him. It is a time for getting, not for giving. And I want you to see how this dainty cup looked, as soon as it got into his greedy hands."

Again the revealing light fell upon the cup and its beauty and shapeliness disap-



"WITHIN THIS CIRCLE SUDDENLY SPRANG TO VIEW A LITTLE GROUP."

"I have a great number of presents of this sort that I should like to show you if I had time. Here, for instance, is a small glass inkstand that a little boy gave his father. It is one of half-a-dozen presents that he made; it cost only a dime or two, and you think it is not worth much; but now, when I turn the truth-telling light upon it, you see what it is—a vase of solid crystal, most wonderfully engraved with the richest designs. The boy did not make this with his own hands, but he gained every cent that it cost him by patient, faithful, uncomplaining labor. He begged the privilege of earning his Christmas money in this way, and right honestly he earned it; leaving his play whenever he was summoned for any service, without a word of grumbling, and taking upon himself many little labors and cares that would have burdened his father and mother. When he took his money and went out to spend it the day before Christmas, he was happy and proud, because he could fairly call it his own money; and the presents that he bought with it represented

himself, and it was nothing but a common pewter mug, all tarnished and marred, and bent out of form.

"There!" cried the preacher; "that is the kind of thing that is most hateful to me. It hurts me to see lovely things fall into the hands of selfish people, for such people can see no real loveliness in them. It is love that makes all things lovely; and he who has no love in his own heart can discern no love in anything that comes into his hands. What does Christmas mean to such a one? What good does it do him? It does him no good; it does him harm, every time. Every gift that he gets makes him a little greedier than he was before. That is the way it works with a certain kind of Sunday-school children. They come in, every year, just before Christmas, only because they hope to get something; they take what they can get, and grumble because it isn't more, and go away, and that's the last of them till Christmas comes round again. That's what they think of Christmas. They think it is a pig's feast. Precious little they know about it. I know them, thousands of them! But they never

get anything from me,—never! They think they do, but that's a mistake! I don't like to see my pretty things marred and spoiled like this cup. I'm not going to give to those who are made worse by receiving.

"No! I can do better. I can find people enough to whom it is worth while to give Christmas gifts because there is love in their hearts; and the gift of love awakens more love. Those who know the joy of giving are made better by receiving. And there are hosts of them, too, millions of them; tens of millions, I believe, more this Christmas than ever before since the babe was born in Bethlehem; people whose pleasure it is to give pleasure to others; good-willers, cheerful workers, loving helpers, generous hearts, who have learned and remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Through all this part of Santa Claus's sermon Mortimer had known that his face was growing redder and redder; he was sure that the eyes of all the people in the church were being fixed on him; he felt that he could not endure it another moment, and he caught up his hat and was going to rush out of the building, when suddenly the voice was silent, and he looked up to see what it meant—and Santa Claus was not there; it was Doctor Burrows again, and he was just closing the Bible and taking up the hymn-book. Mortimer glanced around him and drew a long breath of relief.

As they walked back to the hotel, Mr. Murray asked Mortimer how he liked the sermon.

"Which sermon?" asked Mortimer.

"Why, Dr. Burrows' sermon, of course."

"Oh, yes, I forgot. It was a good sermon, wasn't it?"

"Excellent. What was the text?"

"'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Wasn't that the way he ended up?" asked Mortimer, brightening.

"It was."

"I thought so."

"Thought so; didn't you hear it?"

"Yes, I heard that. But—I was hearing—something else about that time, and I wasn't sure."

"What else did you hear?"

"Lots. P'raps I'll tell you some time," replied the lad.

Mr. Murray did not press the question, and Mortimer was silent. All that day and the next Mortimer seemed to have much serious thinking to do; he was a little reluctant to take his Christmas presents, and he received them at last with a tender gratitude that he had never shown before.

"It must have been Dr. Burrows' sermon," said Mr. Murray to his wife as they were talking it over the next night. "I didn't think Mortimer could get so much out of it; in fact I thought he was asleep part of the time, but it seems to have taken hold of him in the right way. It was a good sermon and a practical one. I'm going to ask our minister to exchange some time with Dr. Burrows."

"I wish he would," said Mrs. Murray.

That was the way Mr. and Mrs. Murray looked at it. But I think that if they had asked Mortimer, Mortimer could have told them that it would be a much better idea to suggest to their minister that he exchange some time with the Reverend Doctor Santa Claus.

A MODERN LOCOMOTIVE.

In a modern locomotive there are nearly six thousand pieces. Some of these are very small. Isolated and alone, how useless and valueless, but organized into an engine, and that vitalized as it may be, what a mighty force is secured. So in our churches are thousands of young people. As individuals and alone they regard themselves of no service, but organized and then consecrated to service, what a might they may become in leading back this lost world to Christ.

A GREAT WRONG.

The parents who rear their sons in idleness are doing them an unspeakable harm. Every boy is entitled to know by actual experience what hard manual labor means, and to get the blessing that comes from toughened muscles and a sun-tanned skin. —*Christian Advocate, Nashville.*