

## The Gifts of Life.

A STORY OF TWO FRIENDS.

They had been girls at school together, and all their lives had lived in the same busy little town, and they continued fast friends long after their school days were over.

Even as a child, Alice Moreham had given promise of unusual beauty, and when she budded into womanhood, there was not a lovelier face than hers to be seen in all Selwood. She was only nineteen when her beauty attracted the eyes of Mr. George Earle, one of the owners of a great carpet factory, and a man nearly twice her years, who sought her hand in marriage.

On her marriage she severed every connection with her past life, including her friendship with Bessie Linton. The latter was piqued beyond measure, and, though for a time she pretended great indifference to her old friend's apparent good fortune, suffered many secret pangs of envy.

A year later she married a young engine man in the carpet factory; so in these widely different positions the two girls took up the responsibilities and duties of wifehood.

Time went on, and many children came home to the engine-man and Bessie; while in their magnificent house, in a select quarter of the town, George Earle and Alice lived childless and alone. Bessie gave way to open envy of her old friend; and as the years passed, and her own lot seemed to grow harder, this feeling increased.

When she happened to be out marketing, with a baby in her arms, and other little ones tugging at her skirts, it filled her with a kind of frenzy if Alice chanced to roll by in her carriage dressed in the costliest raiment that money could buy. She would not suffer herself to look at her, though once she saw Alice's lovely eyes fixed on her with a world of wistful yearning in their depths.

It was Christmas eve; but the peace and gladness of Christmastide were sadly lacking from the little two roomed house to which Bessie had come as a bride twelve years before. The husband had been laid aside with a severe attack of pleurisy, and, though he was now on the road to recovery, it would be a few weeks before he was able to return to his work. He had received the half of his usual wages from the beginning of his illness, but it was a small sum to meet the needs of a sick man and fill the mouths of seven children besides, and Bessie's heart grew fierce within her as she listened to the constant cry for something to eat.

More than once her husband had urged her to go to his master, George Earle, and seek some relief, but she persistently refused. George Earle was known to be a hard man, but even had he been one of the most benevolent, the mere fact that he was Alice's husband was enough.

Bessie had spent the day railing bitterly against the misfortunes of their lot, and, when evening came, went out with a few shillings in her purse—all they possessed in the world—to see what she could procure to keep them from absolute starvation for another day. She left the eldest girl in charge of her sick father, and took the baby and another of the younger ones with her. Both were bright, rosy children, and the bustle of the streets pleased and amused them.

Happy-faced mothers and sisters were hurrying in and out of the shops, laden with suspicious looking brown-paper parcels, and thinking doubtless, of the wonderful surprises that many would get on joyful Christmas morning, when they discovered the contents of these parcels.

There was nothing very tempting in Bessie's baskets—a loaf of bread, a tiny bit of meat for her husband, and a few bones and a handful of vegetables to make soup for the children.

When these purchases were made, to please Nell, the little girl she had brought with her, she stood to let her look at a splendid display of toys in one of the shop windows.

Nell's eyes grew large with wonder and delight when she saw the white woolly lambs, the cats and dogs, and last of all, the lovely pink-cheeked dolls. She entreated her mother to buy her one of the dolls, and, being sharply refused, began to cry bitterly.

Bessie seized hold of her arm and was about to drag her away, when some one came alongside of them, and, turning, she saw Alice. It was the first time for thirteen years that the two women had stood face to face, and the contrast between them was almost tragic.

Bessie looked twice her years; the spirit of envy and discontent had aged her before her time, and the expression in her face at that moment was not good to see.

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

Alice had changed, too. She was still beautiful, though her cheeks had lost their roundness, and there was a certain pathetic droop about her finely molded lips. Neither were those wistful, yearning eyes like the sunlit eyes of old. It was this fact that kept Bessie from hurrying away before Alice had time to speak.

"You have not forgotten me, Bessie," she said sadly. "I have longed so often to see you again, but for some reason you seemed to be angry with me, and I was afraid of you. Come, let us be friends for one night at least, just as we used to be, long, long ago."

"You don't need me now," replied Bessie, ungraciously. "You have plenty of fine friends and everything you want."

"Everything I want," repeated Alice, with a low, mocking laugh; "you are quite wrong. I have got everything but what I want—Bessie! I would give up all I have, just to put that baby's head on my breast and know that it was mine—altogether mine. I am so hungry for love; have always wanted it, would have had it rather than all the riches in the world. But, ah me! the riches are given without stint and the love withdrawn. Why is it so?"

"I can't say, but it's a pity we've each got what the other wants," said Bessie; but there was a distinct softening in her voice. "I think I could get along without the babies if I had the riches."

"If you were in my place, you would not think so," said Alice, still passionately. "Give me your baby in my arms just for a minute. I dream often what it must be to have a little one like that to love; it is so lonely sometimes."

"You have your husband," said Bessie, as she gave up the child.

"Yes," answered Alice, slowly, and paused for a moment to watch the child nestling its head wonderingly against her rich furs; "but he has no time to think of me," she went on, "and he is so engrossed in money-making I seldom see him. We are not unhappy, but my heart sickens and hungers for want of love. Dear little innocent thing; O Bessie, do not think any longer that I am more fortunate than you. God has given you the best blessing. You might let me help you, and so put to some use my seemingly useless life. I overheard your little girl's eager pleading before you turned and saw me. Come, we will go into the shop and buy a doll for her now. My purse is full enough, and I am tired of buying things for myself."

Bessie yielded, and they all went into the toy-shop. Alice bought the prettiest doll that was to be had, then proceeded to select something for each of the other children. Much to Bessie's astonishment, she knew all their names, and the age of each one.

When the purchases were made she insisted on walking home with her old friend to help to carry the parcels; and as they went Bessie unfolded her troubles. Alice was greatly concerned when she heard all, and stopped by the way to order provisions.

"God reward you for your goodness," said Bessie, brokenly, and wrung Alice's hand at parting.

"I deserve no reward," Alice gravely replied. "Tonight I have learned for the first time the true meaning of riches. God forgive me for neglecting his privileges so long."

"God forgive me, too, for my foolish envy and discontent," said Bessie to herself, as she re-entered her humble home; and looking round the group of happy faces, her heart thrilled for the first time with joy in her own possessions.—London Globe.

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## The Hole in Mrs. Washington's Door.

BY ELIZABETH PRESTON ALLAN.

Joe and I had a fine picnic the other day. Our North Carolina Aunt Jane came to our house on a visit, and of course she must go to see Mt. Vernon, George Washington's old home, you know.

Our house is a mile or two out of Alexandria, so we hitched up the pony cart and drove Aunt Jane into town one morning, to take the electric car for Mt. Vernon.

Joe and I and a lunch basket were going along.

While we waited at the car station on Fairfax street, a noisy crowd of school girls dashed up from the R. and P. station. They had come from Richmond on a "vestibule" to go picnicking at Mt. Vernon.

So the electric car was pretty full, but Joe and I got one seat, and the lunch basket and Aunt Jane another. There isn't much noise on 'em, you know; you just whizz along pretty quietly; so, by wriggling around in our seats, we could talk to Aunt Jane all the way. She asked us if we had ever been to Mt. Vernon before.

"Not on the electric," says Joe, "cause it hasn't been running very long, but father drove Arthur and me over there once, when we were little boys."

The old lady gave a grunt, and I knew she was thinking that we were not very big boys now.

"Well, what did you see?" says she.

"Whew! we saw a lot," says I.

But, do you know, after Aunt Jane had made us tell everything we could remember, she said, la! she didn't think that was much.

"Now, I am going in for offering a prize," says Aunt Jane. "I've got a gold dollar in my trunk, a shining fellow, wrapped up in tissue paper, and I am going to give it to the one who sees the most to-day."

You may be sure we used our eyes that day, and it seemed to us that what we two fellows didn't see, was not worth seeing.

The car was too full for us to get seats together, going back to Alexandria, so we spent the time counting up what we had seen.

Presently Joe whispered out loud to me, across the backs of two seats, "One hundred and ten." "One hundred and twelve," I called back, and that set the school girls to giggling. But, for that matter, the girls laughed all the way, both trips.

Joe put his head down in his hands and remembered two more things; one was the custard cup used by General Washington at some great dinner, and one was a little mahogany table that would turn a somersault, and go and flop against the wall.

Now Joe was even with me, and I must think of one more thing. I thought and I thought, but could only see the great, wide river, the high, green bluff, the white stuccoed house, the old-fashioned garden set around with box, and all these sights I had counted in my "one hundred and twelve."

At last I remembered six rubber buckets, set under one of the cabinets in the upstairs hall; they were for use in case of fire. This set me "one hundred and eighteen," so there now! I was easy and could look about and enjoy myself while Joe was scrubbing up six more things.

He had only thought of four more by the time we got to Alexandria, but Aunt Jane let the time run on till we should reach our own front gate. So I whistled as we drove through the trees, and pretended not to be thinking of Mt. Vernon; while Joe was frowning, and screwing up his face and trying to think up two more things.

But in fact I had thought of one more myself, I was crazy to tell Aunt Jane, but I kept it to spring on Joe, in case he should get even with me.

Sure enough, just as our white gate came in sight with a big holly tree beside it, Joe sang out. "It's a tie, Artie! I've thought of the stove in the kitchen fireplace and the picture of the prison keys—that French prison, you know; the picture hangs in the upstairs hall."

We were close on the gate now, but I caught the reins and slowed. "I'm one ahead though!" I shouted; "I've thought of the hole in Mrs. Washington's chamber door, cut for her cat."

I had won! But Joe was so tickled about the hole that he didn't seem to mind about the gold dollar. As for Aunt Jane, she nearly fell off her seat of the pony cart, for laughing.

Joe hadn't seen the hole in Mrs. Washington's door; neither had Aunt Jane. One of the school girls showed it to me, and when you go to Mt. Vernon, you'll find it in the door of the third story room, southeast corner.

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## A Compliment From the Heart.

An aged man and woman stopped opposite the Central high school building a few days ago and looked across at that rather imposing pile. They were plainly but neatly dressed, and while it was evident they were from the rural districts, there was nothing in their appearance to attract comment. A young man was waiting for a cross-town car close to where the strangers stopped. To him the aged man turned.

"That's a school-house, I judge?" he said.

"That's the Central high school," replied the young man.

The old man looked interested.

"That's the principal high school, Mary," he remarked to the old lady.

Then he turned back to the young man.

"We haven't been in Cleveland for a number of years," he said. "I guess it ain't since the Garfield funeral, an' we're just lookin' around. We take a good deal of interest in schools and school-houses."

He paused and looked toward the sweet-faced old lady, who nodded brightly.

"Then you have children?" said the young man.

"Just one," replied the old man.

"Of course he is through school?"

"Long ago," said the stranger. "How long is it, Mary?—five years since he graduated, ain't it?"

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