"Mother's Children."

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY WILLIAM CLYDE FITCH.

You see, we knew it would be a sad Christmas for mother and father. For that matter, it would be sad for us, too; but then we were young—at least, that was what most everyone said, as if it made a difference; so we supposed it must. We were surprised, when we counted, to find how short a time it was since Dick had left us—it did seem so very long. We always say Dick has gone away; it sounds too cruel to say our dear old Dick is dead. Not that he was really old, for he was the youngest, and the pet of the family. Mother always called him "her baby," and father "his boy." Arthur used to say he didn't see where we came in, unless we were father's baby and mother's boy, which always made me laugh, it was so absurd.

We did find out what we were. It was that dreadful day when we had come back from the churchyard, and the house was, oh! how still and lonely! and in the library, where we were, Dick's little chair in the corner made me feel as if the whole world had been emptied out and I was in it alone. Mother came in, looking so sad, with her eyes full of tears—she who had been so brave through it all—and Arthur and I went up and put our arms about her. She held us close to her, and kissed us both, and said: "My children, my children!" I had what Arthur calls an Adam's apple in my throat, and could not speak a word; but he said: "Yes, mother, that is what we are—your children; and we will never leave you, or be anything but your children," while I laid my cheek against hers, and squeezed her hand, to show her I meant it too.

We had had such a dear Christmas last year, though Dick was quite ill for a part of the day from eating two whole candy apples whose cheeks were painted a most beautiful red. Mother had told him not to eat them, but he forgot that until they were both eaten. I remember so plainly how he sang in church the night before—'twas just like an angel; even Aunt Sue spoke of it, and she never praises anyone.

Dick had been gone now ever since spring, and, as I said, we knew this Christmas would be very sad for dear mother and father; so Arthur and I went into the play-room one day after lessons and held a meeting to decide what "mother's children" should do to make this Christmas brighter. Arthur is so funny! He said we must behave legally, and the proper way to do was to resolve ourselves into a committee of the whole. I didn't know what that was, but was willing if it would not be too much trouble; and it proved no trouble at all, for you only had to say you were so, and there you were. I told Arthur he must have made some mistakes, for this was just like when I used to pretend I was Queen Elizabeth in one of mother's wrappers, with my hair rolled up, and a napkin ring on it for a crown, giving a (penny) ring to the Earl of Leicester, which was Arthur in my cape and grandfather's sword; but Arthur said there was no pretense about it, and it was just like a girl for me to think so. I don't know what I should be like if it isn't a girl. Arthur seems to forget there's anything besides boys. Well, after we had become a committee of the whole, Arthur appointed me vice-president and secretary, and that left president and treasurer for him. I wanted to be treasurer very much, but I didn't say anything, for I saw Arthur wanted it, too; still, I didn't see what there would be for me to do, but Arthur told me there was enough for a girl. When he saw how disappointed I was, though he did say if I would request his resignation he would give up his office, but of course I didn't want to do anything like that. Then we talked over plans, and every time I had an idea, something very nice, Arthur would have one, too, and call me to order and say the president had the floor, which meant he was to tell his idea first. I did get so discouraged!

We decided, besides, being very good, and not going off by ourselves that day, we must begin by having a grand surprise. We must give both father and mother a lovely present without their suspecting it. The only trouble was how to get it. We both had our banks where we'd been saving up for Christmas, but if we gave all we had in them to mother and father, instead of giving to Bridget and Jane, and our "poors," which we always did, they would not be pleased at all, we knew. So Arthur said the committee of the whole would retire and draw up a plan to present to the president, but as the schoolroom was the only place we wouldn't be interrupted in, we only pretended to retire. And all of a sudden I had a splendid idea. I watched Arthur till I made sure he had no idea to call me to order for, and then I told him. It was this: First, we would go to father, make him promise on his honor he would not tell, and then ask him, instead of giving us a Christmas present, to give each of us the money, so we could get something for mother; and next, go to mother and do the same with her. With all that money we could get both a beautiful present. We knew what father would probably give us—we always did. Mother was the one who surprised us; we used to tell father what we wanted. Arthur was going to ask for a bicycle, and I had made up my mind for a willow rocking chair—a little one with light-blue ribbon bows, to have all for myself in my own room. I did hate to give up my chair, but I knew it was selfish to feel that way; and mother always told me selfish people were unhappy, so I determined I would not be selfish and unhappy, and I pretended that if I had gotten the chair it would have been uncomfortable, and broken down with me the first time I sat in it. Arthur thought my plan a good one, though he did want a bicycle very much; still, he wanted more to help mother and father. It made me feel better to have him own up about the bicycle, because I had felt the same way about my chair, and I told him what a disappointment that would have turned out if I had asked for it, and advised him to pretend he'd have taken a "header" off the bicycle the second time he mounted it, so he couldn't ride for months—I thought it would help him a great deal. But he only told me I was just like a girl again, which I am getting used to now, and don't mind so much. When we had made up our minds to give up our presents, we both said we had not dreamed it would be so easy. We were so happy over our plan that, after all, we were glad to have this way instead of any other—it seemed more like mother's way. That was all we could do that day, so Arthur declared the committee honorably discharged, and the meeting adjourned *sine die*. Ever since he had commenced reading Cæsar he had been very proud of his Latin, but even I knew enough to know *sine die* was wrong, because we had to meet the next day, there was so little time before Christmas. I told Arthur, and he said we could meet all the same, only that was the proper way for closing the meeting.

The next morning we met again. I had been trying to think for an hour, hemming some napkins for mother, what we should get for her present. I was to think of mother's and Arthur of father's. I could not decide between a sealskin sacque and a piece of statuary for the parlor. I thought mother really ought to have the sacque—for she always went out, no matter how stormy or cold it was, if there was a poor person to visit or any one in trouble who needed her; but I knew it must cost a very great deal. For that matter, I was afraid a piece of statuary would, too; but I knew mother was very fond of statuary, for I had heard her say so often. Arthur had only thought of a set of books for father, and said I would have to give up both the sealskin sacque and the statuary for mother, for both would cost more than we could spend. That only made me all the more anxious to get them; but if we did not have enough money, of course we would have to give them up. It was hard work thinking of something else. Arthur proposed getting mother's party dress, though he knows she never goes to parties, except little teas or dinners or something like that, and I told him I guessed a party dress would cost as much as the statuary. He said we could get one ready-made, and ready-made clothes were always cheaper; but after a while he acknowledged that clothes would be horrid. Then I had such an idea.

"Arthur, I cried, "a picture of Dick!"

"The very thing," he said. "Elsie, you're a trump. A crayon head!"

"A large one, in a frame."

"Yes, and we'll go and see Mr. Lorne about it." Mr. Lorne was an artist friend of ours, and would tell us, we knew, who would do it the best and quickest.

Father consented to the plan for mother's sake, and mother did, thinking it would cheer up father, and both promised to be as secret as possible. Of course we did not tell either what the present was, for we decided we would have to give the picture to both together. We had such a time deciding how to give it. I said, give the picture to mother and the frame to father—the picture to mother because she always called Dick *her baby*. But Arthur said father always called him *his boy*, so why not give the picture to father? And finally we settled it that the best way was to give it, all framed, to both.

Mr. Lorne found out for us just the right person to make the picture, and helped us choose the frame. We had a sweet photograph of Dick in his chorister's robe, to have copied; and we ordered a broad, old oak frame, with a bar of music from Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" burned across the top. It was very hard to keep the secret, only I knew all the surprise would be gone if I told; and then I wouldn't, anyway, because Arthur said I would.

Christmas Eve the picture came; we smuggled it upstairs into my closet, and hung my best dress over it so no one could see it. Arthur and I were so happy, and did feel so mysterious. When I went upstairs to get my hat and cloak to go to church, he actually caught me in his arms and kissed me, though he hardly ever does. We all went to church together. It looked beautiful, with its ropes of green winding round the big white pillars, and the wreaths on the gallery railing, and over the chancel, in letters of holly, the "Peace on earth, good-will toward men." We had gotten used to not seeing Dick amongst the choristers, but somehow to-night all the old feeling came back when I heard the faint "A men" to the prayer away off in the robing room; and then the sweet, distant music growing clearer and louder, until up in front of the chancel they came, led on and urged on by the organ—

"On—ward—Chris—tian—sol—diers—
March—ing—as—to—war—"

I felt as if I could not stand it; as if I *must* see Dick there at the head of the boys, and hear his voice as it always came out high and sweet above the others, on

"With—the cross—of Jesus,"

and then dropping again,

"Go—ing—on—before."

Looking up, I saw the old look of pain coming over the dear mother's face, and I was ashamed to think how, on this night of all nights, I was forgetting to help. I shut my eyes, for I knew the words as well as Dick had known them, and I just *thought* down the tears, and, slipping my hand into mother's as we stood up, I sang too.

I forgot Dick was gone; I saw him in the choir, just as he looked in the picture, only he was singing, singing with me! It seemed as if I could hear his voice sweeter and clearer than all the others, and I sang, and forgot everything—forgot the church, and everybody about me, everything except Dick!

"Glo—ry—land—and—hon—or,"

up swelled the music, and it seemed as if angels were waving the "Peace On Earth, Good-Will Toward Men." Then, with another "A-men," the music stopped and service began, and brought me back from I did not know where. I still had hold of mother's hand, and she was looking at me in a strange sort of way, and there were tears in her eyes, but she smiled, and, besides, the tired, pained look in her face was gone.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

When we came down stairs Christmas morning, Arthur and I took father and mother to the door of father's study, where we had put Dick's picture, so that it would be the first thing you saw as you went into the room. Arthur had a little speech, which he had written out and learned, to make before we went in; it was really very good, just like the big speeches in the newspapers, and commenced, "Ladies and gentlemen;" but he forgot it right in the middle, and ended with just telling our plan, and why we did it. Then we all went in. Mother started and cried "Oh!" but father didn't say one word; he just looked around at Arthur and me and then put his arm about mother, and, going nearer, they stood looking at the picture together. I cried—I could not help it—and Arthur turned his back, till mother called us, and took us in her arms as she had done that dreadful day in the spring, saying again, "My children, my children!"—only there was a difference. Father was wiping his glasses, but when he had finished he kissed us both, and said, "God bless you, my dears."

And that day was one of the happiest Arthur and I ever spent—we both said so; and at night mother and father said it had been a dear Christmas, thanks to their children. And Arthur and I just squeezed each other's hands and looked at each other, we were so glad.—*Sel.*

Tom White and Peter Smithers.

It was a cold snowy morning, a few days before Christmas, when Tom White (familiarly called "Windy" by his boy friends) awoke to find himself shoeless and without a cent in his pockets. Tom was a bootblack by profession, and had wandered about from town to town trying to make enough to keep body and soul together. He finally concluded to settle down, and chose one of the leading cities of Ohio as his place of abode. His best friend was Peter Smithers, a newsboy. The two boys were constantly together, when not at work, and they were ever ready to fight for one another. Without home and friends, and thrown upon their own resources, it was not surprising that their principles were somewhat demoralized.

Tom arose from his bed, which was nothing more than a closet in an old tenement house, and arrayed himself in his only suit of clothes. He held a piece of an old looking glass in front of him, that he might see to comb his hair.

"What's the use, Windy White, of you trying to be anything," he soliloquized, as he stooped down to tie the remaining portion of his worn out shoes to his feet. Hearing a merry whistle, he turned and saw Peter coming toward him.

"I say, Windy, what makes you look so sorry?" Peter asked. "Come, have a piece of bread to warm you up before we start out this cold morning."

Windy took the bread with rather a dubious look on his face as to the warmth of the article; but he eagerly devoured it.

"I tell you, Peter, I am reckless, and I am not goin' to tramp about in the cold with bare feet any longer."

"What can you do?" anxiously asked Peter.

Windy glanced around to see if any one was near, then whispered something in Peter's ear that caused the boy to turn pale. "Of course I'll do anything you want me to, cause I like you," replied Peter.

"Don't fret about me,' said Windy, as he picked up his box and started out to perform his day's work.

True to his word, Peter was at the place of meeting, at the appointed hour.

Windy came up the street rather hurriedly, and seeing Peter, said: "Hello! you are here, I see. Now I want you to keep your eyes open. You see yonder's a shoe store; I am going to make a break at that box of shoes, and if I don't have something to keep my feet warm, my name isn't Tom White."

"O Windy, don't do it," said Peter trembling with fear.

"Don't be a baby," said Tom, putting on a bold front. "You keep a lookout and tell me if you see any one coming."

Walking noiselessly over to the store Tom sneaked slily up to a box, grabbed a pair of shoes, and running over to Peter, cried in an exultant voice "Come on, pard; run for your life."

The boys ran, but in the excitement Tom pulled down the shoes that were attached to a string hanging above the box, and the noise attracted the attention of the proprietor. Upon going to the door he caught sight of the boys running away, and immediately he notified the police. Much to their surprise as they sat in the dark entry way of a building to rest, a big burly policeman jerked them by the collar and said, "I arrest you scamps for theft."

"Please, sir, he didn't steal," said Tom, pointing to Peter, who was crying.

"No, sir, I didn't steal; but I'm not goin' to leave you, Windy," Peter said, drying his eyes.

"No danger of your leaving Windy; you will both sleep in jail to-night," answered the policeman, as he took them to the cold, dreary building for criminals.

"Windy, I'd sooner be out in the cold, than behind the bars," replied Peter, his eyes filling up again.

"Get into your room, boys," growled the turnkey as he shoved them into the cell and locked the door.

"See what a dandy bed we'll have, pard," said Tom, throwing himself upon the little iron cot.

Tired and worn out with their hardships, the boys soon fell asleep.

The night before Christmas, Sheriff Howard concluded he would call upon the boys, and cheer them up with a few kind words. Drawing near their cell he heard them earnestly conversing. He paused a moment that he might hear what they were saying.

"Windy, do you hear the sleigh-bells jingle? This is Christmas Eve, and I'll bet every boy in town is going to hang up his stockin'," said Peter wistfully.

Tom studied a few minutes, then jumping up, said, "I'll tell you what let's do; let's hang up our socks."

"Why, Windy, we haven't any socks," exclaimed Peter.

"I declare, Peter, you always come in on the home stretch," laughed Tom. "Sure enough, we haven't any socks. Guess we'd better stay right where we are for the rest of the winter," and he buried his face in his hands.

Peter crossed over to him, and said: "Don't cry, Windy; I've thought of something else. Do you suppose God ever sees poor boys in jail? Maybe if we'd kneel down and say our prayers, Santa Claus would come and leave something for us."

"I am too bad to pray, Peter," sobbed Tom. "He might listen to you."

"No, Windy, you must pray too. If you are sorry you stole the shoes, and ask for forgiveness, I know God will answer your prayer."

"I'd be an awful good boy the rest of my life, if I could be forgiven for being a thief," replied Tom, brightening up.

"Well, we will fix our coats, so if Santa Claus comes he can leave something for us. See, here is a piece of string, we can tie around the bottom of the sleeves," said Peter, fairly dancing with joy, as he arranged things to suit himself.

"Come, Tom, let us kneel down by the bed and pray. Don't be afraid, but just believe that God will listen to all we say." The two little forms knelt by the bedside, and as Sheriff Howard listened to their simple, but earnest prayer, the tears dropped from his eyes; he turned and left them with the resolve, that as far as it was in his power, every request they had asked, should be granted. Hurrying out of the gloomy building, he wended his way to Mr. Black's—the man who had complained against the boys—and found in him an attentive listener, as he related their conversation, word for word.

* * * * * *

"Christmas gift, Windy!" called Peter, long before daylight.

Tom rubbed his eyes and said in a sleepy voice, "'Taint Christmas yet, Peter; go to sleep."

"I can't go to sleep, Windy: I think there must be some candy in our sleeves."

"Do you honestly think so?" asked Tom, now fully aroused.

"Yes I do! We'll have to stay in bed, though, till daylight.

"Let's get out easy and feel around. I can't wait," said Tom, climbing out of bed.

Peter heard a prolonged whistle. "What's the matter, Windy?" he called.

"O Peter, you ought to see what's here!"

"You can't see nothin'," said Peter, dubiously.

"Well then, you just ought to feel," replied Tom impatiently.

Peter ventured over, and taking hold of the coat sleeves, he found both of them fairly stuffed.

"O Windy, we are going to have a jolly good Christmas," said he.

The boys walked to the window and looked out into the yard below. Suddenly, as if some fairy had waved her wand, a ray of light burst through the darkness. The boys glanced around them, piled upon chairs were new clothes—from an overcoat down to shoes and stockings. They jumped up and down in their joy, forgetting for the moment their surroundings.

"I say, Peter Smithers, you are a trump," said Tom, as he commenced trying on his new clothes.

"O Windy, I didn't give you those things; don't you remember you prayed for them?" said Peter, reproachfully.

"That's so," said Tom, looking confused. "I shall always say my prayers; God has been better to me than I deserve."

"Merry Christmas, boys," called Mr. Howard, as he came to their cell. "I have a surprise for you. Mr. Blake, from whom you took the shoes, has withdrawn the complaint against you, and we are going to try and get you positions where you can earn an honest living."

The boys gave Mr. Howard a hearty embrace, and declared they would never steal again.

Mr. Blake received them kindly, and when he bade the Sheriff good-bye he thanked him for having shown him the way to save two precious souls.—*Harriette Carpenter Cullaton.*

The Day After.

BY HELEN H. BLAKE.

"Why don't people ever write stories about the day after Christmas?" Doretta Stanford, aged ten, asked of her nurse as she came into the nursery to dress the child for an unusually early breakfast. It was only two days before that day of all the year to children—Christmas. Mrs. Stanford was going to the city—ostensibly to see Santa Claus—though, I think, if the truth had been known, she had already had more than one interview with him about Doretta's presents. However, Mrs. Stanford was going to the city again this morning to see Santa Claus for a final talk about Christmas; and Doretta had asked as a particular favor that she might get up and have breakfast with her mother, even though she had to leave her warm bed an hour earlier than usual. Nurse had come in expecting to find Doretta sound asleep and she was a little surprised to be greeted with a question that sounded very wide awake indeed.

"Why don't people ever write stories about the day after Christmas?"

"I don't know, dearie; don't they do it?"

"Why no! of course they don't. You never in all your life saw a story 'bout the day after Christmas; they're all just about Christmas itself, and that's happy enough without having stories about it to read. But the day after is just miserable, and there isn't even a story to read about it."

"Then that's just the best time to sit down and read Christmas stories; you don't have time on Christmas day to read them."

"But who wants to read about something that's all gone and done with and won't come again for a whole year? If you felt as I did the day after last Christmas, you'd just wish that somebody'd write a great long story, that didn't say a word about Christmas, and would take you all day to read. And then maybe you'd forget what a happy time you'd had the day before and what a miserable time you were having now."

"Just hear the child!" exclaimed Nurse. "I'll tell you what I think, Miss Doretta, that'any little girl as has such a beautiful home as you've got, and such a kind mother and father don't deserve them at all, if she's ever unhappy, the day after Christmas, or any other day."

"I wasn't unhappy, I was just miserable, 'cause the day before I'd had everything I wanted all day long. And then that morning I woke up and thought there was nothing more to wish for, and I couldn't think of anything I wanted for next Christmas."

"'Doretta,'" called her mother from the next room, "I'm going down to breakfast now, are you ready?"

"Yes, mamma, in just a minute," and Doretta slipped hastily into her dress and waited impatiently for it to be fastened. She overtook her mother, "my beautiful mamma," as she often called her, at the door of the breakfast room, and they went in together, the little girl chattering now about Santa Claus. Breakfast was well along before the little girl ceased her happy chatter, and Mrs. Stanford took the opportunity to ask:

"What were you telling nurse so earnestly this morning, Doretta?"

"Nothing, only"—she hesitated. Mrs. Stanford smiled. "Only what? my child."

"Only how miserable I was, the day after Christmas, last year."

"Why was that, dear? We all did everything we could to make you happy on Christmas day; didn't a little of the happiness last over?"

"I guess you did too much," said Doretta, sagely. "I couldn't think of anything to want the next day, and I just almost cried over it."

"Something must be very wrong somewhere when that is the state of affairs," said Mrs. Stanford, half to herself. "You were like Alexander, dear, weren't you?"

"Was he the man you read me about who cried because he had no more worlds to conquer?"

"Yes, wasn't he foolish?"

"I don't know; perhaps he was. But I know almost how he felt, Mamma."

The carriage was announced, and Mrs. Stanford hastened away. But her daughter's words had left an impression on her mind which she did not soon get rid of. As she had said "something was wrong somewhere." And when she found something wrong, Mrs. Stanford never was satisfied until she had made an effort to right it.

It is very doubtful if another thought of the morning's conversation crossed Doretta's mind. The grand day of all the year was so near that it pushed everything else out of sight. And when Christmas day dawned, bright and clear, it looked upon no happier child in all Christendom than Doretta Stanford. All the morning it seemed as if she were growing happier every moment. Santa Claus had brought her everything she had wished for and some things she had not thought of, but now that she had them, they pleased her more than the things she had wished for. All the morning she was busy looking over and over again all the pretty things that had come to her and arranging them in her room. After lunch her father played some of her new games with her. And over one of them—"Tiddley-Winks"—they had so much fun that the sound of their laughter brought Mrs. Stanford down stairs to join them. Later Mrs. Stanford made a slight change in the usual order of events for Christmas day; she asked Doretta to take a walk with her

"I am going to make a call," she said, "and I should like very much to have you with me." Doretta ran to put on her wraps, though in her heart she wondered what her mother meant. A few moments' brisk walking brought them to a small house on the poorest street in the village. Poor as it was, it was clean, but only one of the four rooms was occupied; and it was furnished in the plainest manner possible. When Mrs. Stanford knocked, an elderly lady, as tiny and neat as her own little room, came to the door and greeted them very cordially.

"You sent me such a fine Christmas dinner, ma'am," she said. "It will last me three or four days. But its no use for me to be thanking you; you're all the time doing something for me."

"How are your eyes, Mrs. Taylor?"

"About the same, ma'am. They don't hurt me quite so much I think; but I can't see to read at all. And I believe the doctor thinks I never shall read any more."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Doretta, impulsively. "Do you like reading very much, Mrs. Taylor?"

"Very much, dearie. I don't know what I should have done since my eyes have been so bad, if your mother hadn't so kindly come to read to me sometimes."

Doretta left her chair and went over to Mrs. Taylor's side.

"Won't you let me come and read to you sometimes? I can read pretty well if it isn't too hard. I can read the Bible very well, mamma says. Do you like the Bible?"

"Best of anything, dearie. And I'd like to hear you read it if your mamma will let you come."

Before they left Doretta found out what chapter Mrs. Taylor liked best. And the next morning, the first thing after breakfast, she went and read it over with her mother. Later in the day she fulfilled her promise and went and read it to Mrs. Taylor, so correctly and with so much expression that she said afterward, the familiar chapter had never sounded sweeter than when read by this child.

It was only a small act of kindness, but it made more than one person happy. Mrs. Taylor enjoyed the reading; but far more Mrs. Stanford enjoyed the thought that her little daughter was, of her own accord, showing a thoughtful attention to one who needed it. And most of all, Doretta enjoyed having been of use to some one, having given a little pleasure.

"Mamma," she said on going to bed that night, "I really think to-day has been happier than yesterday. And to-day is the day after Christmas, too, and I thought it would be miserable just as it was last year. What do you think made the difference?"

"I'll tell you, darling. Last year you were thinking just about yourself; while to-day you've been thinking so much about making Mrs. Taylor a little happier that you haven't had time to think of yourself at all. You've been pleasing some one else instead of yourself."

"And I can do that every day in the year, can't I? so that I can be happy any time I want to.

With which happy solution of the problem, "How to be happy," Doretta kissed her mother and went to bed.

Yes, we can all be happy any time we want to, so long as there are those to whom we can render kindly service.

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