

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

It was a profound surprise.

"One," said Bessie, "that mamma mustn't even suspect. We mustn't drop a hint, not the least bit of a one. Mamma'd guess it in no time, if we did."

"Let's pledge ourselves to warfare against the one who gives her a single clue," suggested Harold.

When the four came back from the hall, where they had "taken the oath," they continued their discussion with a remarkably serious air.

"What must we give, something nice, nicer'n anything she got last year?" said Harold, breaking the silence.

"Let's see," pondered Bessie, slowly, her "thinking cap" making itself evident in the tiny "considering pucker" on her forehead. "Her birthday's on Wednesday, and it's Monday now. We've no time to lose."

"Let's get what she'd rather have than anything else, let's!"

It was the first time Carl had spoken since the "secret meeting" had convened.

"That's what we're going to," replied Harold, "why we're thinking so long." And it did seem long; for Harold was expecting any moment to hear Willy Ferguson's "call whistle" at the gate, which meant one little Holman less to discuss the question of the birthday gift.

"She had a watch last year from Switzerland," said Carl, ruefully; for hadn't he seen the stock of fine ones at Freeman's "better'n they make in Switzerland!"

"And a chafing-dish," added Bessie, counting on her fingers, "and a chair and a desk and a—"

"We can't get any of these." It was Harold's turn to think. "Besides, they'd cost—"

"We'd never thought of that," exclaimed Bessie, in dismay, "about the money! I don't believe we can get—I haven't a cent!"

"Nor I!"

Ray "fished" into the pockets of his trousers, his first ones, and draw from their—no—magical depths only a jack-knife handle.

"Then we can't—"

"But we must, Harold!" said Bessie, with all the emphasis she could command.

"We must! Mamma'd feel so disappointed with nothing, now we've planned so much!"

"And we wanted it better'n anything she'd ever had." And Ray looked to Carl.

"And it can be—if you agree!" Carl went to the lower drawer of the book-case and took out his box of "Tom Thumb" stationery. "I just thought of it!"

Bessie looked up inquiringly.

"It's something we each can give, what she's wanted and wanted ever so long! And what she's asked for, too," mysteriously.

"I don't see," said Harold, thoroughly puzzled. "We haven't got any money!"

"Don't need any. Wait! I'll get mine ready, and then you'll see."

Carl went to the table and wrote on a page of delicate paper:

"For Mamma's Birthday Present. I'll give up my whistle in the house forever and ever and ever. CARL."

They all crowded to look over Carl's shoulder.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Bessie. "I know what I'll give!"

"And I!" cried Harold.

Ray didn't quite understand. Bessie whispered something to him, and all that rest could hear was "cap."

What excellent gifts they were!

"I promise not to read a word after it gets dusk, before the gas is lighted."

"BESSIE."

"I'll hang up all my things in their proper place when I come from play or errands. Really and truly. WALL."

"Ray will not forget to take off his cap in the sitting-room."

Mrs. Holman smiled her sweetest mother smile when she received her gifts two days later.

"They are the choicest presents I ever received," she said, happily; "for they are something we all can keep!"—Adelbert F. Caldwell, in *Youth's Companion*.

GIVING, SHE STILL HAD.

In Connecticut, a few years ago, we are told, there lived a lady who had a beautiful flower garden in which she took great pride. The whole neighborhood was proud of it, too, and people drove miles to see it. She fastened two large baskets on the outside of her fence next the road, and every morning these were filled with out flowers—the large, snowy kinds in one basket and the delicate, fragile kinds in the other. All the school children going by helped themselves, and studied the better for it; and business men took a breath of fragrance into their dusty offices which helped the day along. Even the tramps were welcome to all the beauty they could get into their forlorn lives.

"You cut such quantities," some one said to her; "aren't you afraid that you will rob yourself?"

"The more I cut the more I have," she answered. "Don't you know that if plants are allowed to go to seed they stop blooming. I love to give pleasure; and it is profit as well, for my liberal cutting is the secret of my beautiful garden. I am like the man in 'Pilgrim Progress'—the more I give away the more I have."

This is a rule that holds good in other places besides a garden. God is showing us continually that the more we give, the more we have. The more we love others the more we are loved ourselves; and the teaching of the Scripture is constantly fulfilled, "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth."

THE NEXT DUTY.

Then, what is my next duty? What is the thing that lies nearest to me?

"That, I repeat, belongs to your everyday history. No one can answer that question but yourself. Your next duty is just to determine what your next duty is. Is there nothing you neglect? Is there nothing you know you ought not to do? You would know your duty if you thought in earnest about it, and were not ambitious of great things."

"Ah, then," responded Lady Georgiana, with an abandoning sigh, "I suppose it is something commonplace which will make life more dreary than ever. That can not help me."

"It will, if it be as dreary as reading the newspaper to an old deaf aunt. It will soon lead you to something more. Your duty will not begin to comfort you at once, but will at length open the unknown fountain in your heart."—George Macdonald.

AID WITH CHRIST IN GOD.

Dr. Peabody in one of his sermons pictures a vessel lying in a dead calm. But suddenly a sailor sees the pennant stirring far up on the masthead, and at once they raise the upper sails, for they know that a wind is rising in the upper air. Sure enough, the vessel begins to move, propelled by the higher currents, while at the surface of the water there is stirring no breath of air. So also

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An eloquent preacher tells this good joke at his own expense: "When I was in Florida last winter, I preached to a negro congregation one Sunday, excusing myself from saying much on account of my poor health. The colored minister, in his closing prayer, said: 'O, Good Lawd, bless our brother L., who has preached to us in his pore weak way.'"

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