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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Betty's Bright Idea

Harriet Beecher Stowe

"When He ascended up on high,
He led captivity captive,
and gave gifts unto men."
--Eph. iv. 8.

Some say that ever, 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrate,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long.
And then, they say, no evil spirit walks;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, no witch hath power to charm,--
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

Betty's Bright Idea frontisAnd this holy time, so hallowed and so gracious, was settling down over the great roaring, rattling, seething life-world of New York in the good year 1875. Who does not feel its on-coming in the shops and streets, in the festive air of trade and business, in the thousand garnitures by which every store hangs out triumphal banners and solicits you to buy something for a Christmas gift? For it is the peculiarity of all this array of prints, confectionery, dry goods, and manufactures of all kinds, that their bravery and splendor at Christmas tide is all to seduce you into generosity, and importune you to give something to others. It says to you, "The dear God gave you an unspeakable gift; give you a lesser gift to your brother!"

Do we ever think, when we walk those busy, bustling streets, all alive with Christmas shoppers, and mingle with the rushing tides that throng and jostle through the stores, that unseen spirits may be hastening to and fro along those same ways bearing Christ's Christmas gifts to men-- gifts whose value no earthly gold or gems can represent?

Yet, on this morning of the day before Christmas, were these Shining Ones, moving to and fro with the crowd, whose faces were loving and serene as the invisible stars, whose robes took no defilement from the spatter and the rush of earth, whose coming and going was still as the falling snow-flakes. They entered houses without ringing door-bells, they passed through apartments without opening doors, and everywhere they were bearing Christ's Christmas presents, and silently offering them to whoever would open their souls to receive. Like

themselves, their gifts were invisible--incapable of weight and measurement in gross earthly scales. To mourners they carried joy; to weary and perplexed hearts, peace; to souls stifling in luxury and self-indulgence they carried that noble discontent that rises to aspiration for higher things. Sometimes they took away an earthly treasure to make room for a heavenly one. They took health, but left resignation and cheerful faith. They took the babe from the dear cradle, but left in its place a heart full of pity for the suffering on earth and a fellowship with the blessed in heaven. Let us follow their footsteps awhile.

SCENE I.

A young girl's boudoir in one of our American palaces of luxury, built after the choicest fancy of the architect, and furnished in all the latest devices of household decoration. Pictures, statuettes, and every form of *bijouterie* make the room a miracle of beauty, and the little princess of all sits in an easy chair before the fire, and thus revolves with herself:

"O, dear me! Christmas is a bore! Such a rush and crush in the streets, such a jam in the shops, and then *such* a fuss thinking up presents for everybody! All for nothing, too; for nobody Wants anything. I'm sure *I* don't. I'm surfeited now with pictures and jewelry, and bon-bon boxes, and little china dogs and cats--and all these things that get so thick you can't move without upsetting some of them. There's papa, he don't want anything. He never uses any of my Christmas presents when I get them; and mamma, she has every earthly thing I can think of, and said the other day she did hope nobody'd give her any more worsted work! Then Aunt Maria and Uncle John, they don't want the things I give them; they have more than they know what to do with, now. All the boys say they don't want any more cigar cases or slippers, or smoking caps. Oh, dear!"

Here the Shining Ones came and stood over the little lady, and looked down on her with faces of pity, which seemed blent with a serene and half-amused indulgence. It was a heavenly amusement, such as that with which mothers listen to the foolish-wise prattle of children just learning to talk.

As the grave, sweet eyes rested tenderly on her, the girl somehow grew graver, leaned back in her chair, and sighed a little.

"I wish I knew how to be better!" she said to herself. "I remember last Sunday's text, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' That must mean something! Well, isn't there something, too, in the Bible about not giving to your rich neighbors that can give again, but giving to the poor that cannot recompense you? I don't know any poor people. Papa says there are very few deserving poor people. Well, for the matter of that, there aren't many *deserving rich* people. I, for example, how much do I *deserve* to have all these nice things? I'm no better than the poor shop-girls that go trudging by in the cold at six o'clock in the

morning-- ugh! it makes me shiver to think of it. I know if I had to do that I shouldn't be good at all. Well, I'd like to give to poor people, if I knew any."

At this moment the door opened and the maid entered.

"Betty, do you know any poor people I ought to get things for, this Christmas?"

"Poor folks is always plenty, miss," said Betty.

"O yes, of course, beggars; but I mean people that I could do something for besides just give cold victuals or money. I don't know where to hunt them up, and should be afraid to go if I did. O dear! it's no use. I'll give it up."

"Why, Miss Florence, that 'ud be too bad, afther bein' that good in yer heart, to let the poor folks alone for fear of goin' to them. But ye needn't do that, for, now I think of it, there's John Morley's wife."

"What, the gardener father turned off for drinking?"

"The same, miss. Poor boy, he's not so bad, and he's got a wife and two as pretty children as ever you see."

"I always liked John," said the young lady. "But papa is so strict about some things! He says he never will keep a man a day if he finds out that he drinks."

She was quite silent for a minute, and then broke out:

"I don't care; it's a good idea! I say, Betty, do you know where John's wife lives?"

"Yes, miss, I've been there often."

"Well, then, this afternoon I'll go with you and see if I can do anything for them."

SCENE II.

An attic room, neat and clean, but poorly furnished; a bed and a trundle-bed, a small cooking-stove, a shelf with a few dishes, one or two chairs and stools, a pale, thin woman working on a vest.

Her face is anxious; her thin hands tremble with weakness, and now and then, as she works, quiet tears drop, which she wipes quickly. Poor people cannot afford to shed tears; it takes time and injures eyesight.

This is John Morley's wife. This morning he has risen and gone out in a desperate mood. "No use to try," he says. "Didn't I go a whole year and never touch a drop? And now just because I fell once I'm kicked out! No use to try. When a fellow once trips, everybody gives him a kick. Talk about love of Christ! Who believes it? Don't see much love of Christ where I go. Your Christians hit a fellow that's down as hard as anybody. It's everybody for himself and devil take the hindmost. Well, I'll trudge up to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and see if they'll take

me on there--if they won't I might as well go to sea, or to the devil," and out he flings.

"Mamma!" says a little voice, "what are we going to have for our Christmas?"

It is a little girl, with soft curly hair and bright, earnest eyes, that speaks.

A sturdy little fellow of four presses up to the mother's knee and repeats the question, "Sha'n't we have a Christmas, mother?"

It overcomes the poor woman; she leans forward and breaks into sobbing,-- a tempest of sorrow, long suppressed, that shakes her weak frame as she thinks that her husband is out of work, desperate, discouraged, and tempted of the devil, that the rent is falling due, and only the poor pay of her needle to meet it with. In one of those quick flashes which concentrate through the imagination the sorrows of years, she seems to see her little home broken up, her husband in the gutter, her children turned into the street. At this moment there goes up from her heart a despairing cry, such as a poor, hunted, tired-out creature gives when brought to the last gasp of endurance. It was like the shriek of the hare when the hounds are upon it. She clasps her hands and cries out, "O my God, help me."

There was no voice of any that answered; there was no sound of foot-fall on the staircase; no one entered the door; and yet that agonized cry had reached the heart it was meant for. The Shining Ones were with her; they stood, with faces full of tenderness, beaming down upon her; they brought her a Christmas gift from Christ--the gift of trust. She knew not from whence came the courage and rest that entered her soul; but while her little ones stood wondering and silent, she turned and drew to herself her well-worn Bible. Hands that she did not see guided her as she turned the pages, and pointed the words: *He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight.*

She laid down her poor wan cheek on the merciful old book, as on her mother's breast, and gave up all the tangled skein of life into the hands of Infinite Pity. There seemed a consoling presence in the room, and her tired heart found rest.

She wiped away her tears, kissed her children, and smiled upon them. Then she rose, gathered up her finished work, and attired herself to go forth and carry it back to the shop.

"Mother," said the children softly, "they are dressing the church, and the gates are open, and people are going in and out; mayn't we play there by the church?"

The mother looked out on the ivy-grown walls of the church, with its flocks of twittering sparrows, and said:

"Yes, my little birds; you may play there if you'll be very good and quiet."

The mother had only her small, close attic room for her darlings, and to satisfy all their childish desire for variety and motion, she had only the refuge of the streets. She was a decent, godly woman, and the bold manners and evil words of street vagrants were terrible to her; and so, when the church gates were open for daily morning and evening prayers, she had often begged the sexton to let her little ones come in and hear the singing, and wander hand in hand around the old church walls. He was a kindly old man, and the children, stealing round like two still, bright-eyed little mice, had gained upon his heart, and he made them welcome there. It gave the mother a feeling of protection to have them play near the church, as if it were a father's house.

So she put on their little hoods and tippets, and led them forth, and saw them into the yard; and as she looked to the old gray church, with its rustling ivy bowers and flocks of birds, her heart swelled within her. "Yea, the sparrow hath found a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God!" And the Shining Ones walking with her said, "Fear not; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

SCENE III.

The little ones went gayly into the yard. They had been scared by their mother's tears; but she had smiled again, and that had made all right with them. The sun was shining brightly, and they were on the sunny side of the old church, and they laughed and chirped and chattered to each other as merrily as the little birds in the ivy boughs.

The old sexton came to the side door and threw out an armful of refuse greens, and then stopped a moment and nodded kindly at them.

"May we play with them, please, sir?" said the little Elsie, looking up with great reverence.

"Oh, yes, to be sure; these are done with--they are no good now."

"Oh, Tottie!" cried Elsie, rapturously, "just think, he says we may play with all these. Why, here's ever and ever so much green, enough to play house. Let's play build a house for father and mother."

"I'm going to build a big house for 'em when I grow up," said Tottie, "and I mean to have glass bead windows in it."

Tottie had once had presented to him a box of colored glass beads to string, and he could think of nothing finer in the future than unlimited glass beads.

Meanwhile, his sister began planting pine branches upright in the snow, to make her house.

"You see we can make believe there are windows and doors and a roof," she said, "and it's just as good. Now, let's make believe there is a bed in this corner, and we will lie down to sleep."

And Tottie obediently couched himself in the allotted corner and shut his eyes very hard, though after a moment he remarked that the snow got into his neck.

"You must play it isn't snow--play it's feathers," said Elsie.

"But I don't like it," persisted Tottie, "it don't feel a bit like feathers."

"Oh, well, then," said Elsie, accommodating herself to circumstances, "let's play get up now and I'll get breakfast."

Just now the door opened again, and the sexton began sweeping the refuse out of the church. There were bits of ivy and holly, and ruffles of ground-pine, and lots of bright red berries that came flying forth into the yard, and the children screamed for joy. "O Tottie!" "O Elsie!" "Only see how many pretty things--lots and lots!"

The sexton stood and looked and laughed as he saw the little ones so eager for the scraps and remnants.

"Don't you want to come in and see the church?" he said. "It's all done now, and a brave sight it is. You may come in."

They tipped in softly, with large bright, wondering eyes. The light through the stained glass windows fell blue and crimson and yellow on the pillars all ruffled with ground-pine and brightened with scarlet bitter-sweet berries, and there were stars and crosses and mottoes in green all through the bowery aisles, while the organist, hid in a thicket of verdure, was practicing softly, and sweet voices sung:

"Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King."

The little ones wandered up and down the long aisles in a dream of awe and wonder. "Hush, Tottie!" said Elsie when he broke into an eager exclamation, "don't make a noise. I do believe it's something like heaven," she said, under her breath.

They made the course of the church and came round by the door again, where the sexton stood smiling on them.

"You can find lots of pretty Christmas greens out there," he said, pointing to the door; "perhaps your folks would like to have some."

"Oh, thank you, sir," exclaimed Elsie, rapturously. "Oh, Tottie, only think! Let's gather a good lot and go home and dress our room for Christmas. Oh, *won't*

mother be astonished when she comes home, we'll make it so pretty!"

And forthwith the children began gathering into their little aprons wreaths of ground-pine, sprigs of holly, and twigs of crimson bitter-sweet. The sexton, seeing their zeal, brought out to them a little cross, fancifully made of red alder-berries and pine.

Then he said, "A lady took that down to put up a bigger one, and she gave it to me; you may have it if you want it."

"Oh, how beautiful," said Elsie. "How glad I am to have this for mother! When she comes back she won't know our room; it will be as fine as the church."

Soon the little gleaners were toddling off out of the yard--moving masses of green with all that their aprons and their little hands could carry.

The sexton looked after them. "Take heed that ye despise not these little ones," he said to himself, "for in heaven their angels--"

A ray of tenderness fell on the old man's head; it was from the Shining One who watched the children. He thought it was an afternoon sunbeam. His heart grew gentle and peaceful, and his thoughts went far back to a distant green grove where his own little one was sleeping. "Seems to me I've loved all little ones ever since," he said, thinking far back to the Christmas week when his lamb was laid to rest. "Well, she shall not return to me, but I shall go to her." The smile of the Shining One made a warm glow in his heart, which followed him all the way home.

The children had a merry time dressing the room. They stuck good big bushes of pine in each window; they put a little ruffle of ground-pine round mother's Bible, and they fastened the beautiful red cross up over the table, and they stuck sprigs of pine or holly into every crack that could be made, by fair means or foul, to accept it, and they were immensely satisfied and delighted. Tottie insisted on hanging up his string of many-colored beads in the window to imitate the effect of the stained glass of the great church window.

"It looks pretty when the light comes through," he remarked; and Elsie admitted that they might play they were painted windows, with some show of propriety. When everything had been stuck somewhere, Elsie swept the floor, and made up a fire, and put on the tea-kettle, to have everything ready to strike mother favorably on her return.

SCENE IV.

A freezing, bright, cold afternoon. "Cold as Christmas!" say cheery voices, as the crowds rush to and fro into shops and stores, and come out with hands full of presents.

"Yes, cold as Christmas," says John Morley. "I should think so! Cold enough for a fellow that can't get in anywhere--that nobody wants and nobody helps! I should think so."

John had been trudging all day from point to point, only to hear the old story: times were hard, work was dull, nobody wanted him, and he felt morose and surly--out of humor with himself and with everybody else.

It is true that his misfortunes were from his own fault; but that consideration never makes a man a particle more patient or good-natured-- indeed, it is an additional bitterness in his cup. John was an Englishman. When he first landed in New York from the old country, he had been wild and dissipated and given to drinking. But by his wife's earnest entreaties he had been persuaded to sign the temperance pledge, and had gone on prosperously keeping it for a year. He had a good place and good wages, and all went well with him till in an evil hour he met some of his former boon-companions, and was induced to have a social evening with them.

In the first half hour of that evening were lost the fruits of the whole year's self-denial and self-control. He was not only drunk that night, but he went off for a fortnight, and was drunk night after night, and came back to find that his master had discharged him in indignation. John thinks this over bitterly, as he thuds about in the cold and calls himself a fool.

Yet, if the truth must be confessed, John had not much "sense of sin," so called. He looked on himself as an unfortunate and rather ill-used man, for had he not tried very hard to be good, and gone a great while against the stream of evil inclination? and now, just for one yielding, he was pitched out of place, and everybody was turned against him! He thought this was hard measure. Didn't everybody hit wrong sometimes? Didn't rich fellows have their wine, and drink a little too much now and then? Yet nobody was down on *them*.

"It's only because I'm poor," said John. "Poor folks' sins are never pardoned. There's my good wife--poor girl!" and John's heart felt as if it were breaking, for he was an affectionate creature, and loved his wife and babies, and in his deepest consciousness he knew that he was the one at fault. We have heard much about the sufferings of the wives and children of men who are overtaken with drink; but what is not so well understood is the sufferings of the men themselves in their sober moments, when they feel that they are becoming a curse to all that are dearest to them. John's very soul was wrung within him to think of the misery he had brought on his wife and children--the greater miseries that might be in store for them. He was faint of heart; he was tired; he had eaten nothing for hours, and on ahead he saw a drinking saloon. Why shouldn't he go and take one good drink, and then pitch off a ferry-boat into the East River, and so end the whole miserable muddle of life altogether?

John's steps were turning that way, when one of the Shining Ones, who had watched him all day, came nearer and took his hand. He felt no touch; but at that moment there darted into his soul a thought of his mother, long dead, and he stopped irresolute, then turned to walk another way. The hand that was guiding him led him to turn a corner, and his curiosity was excited by a stream of people who seemed to be pressing into a building. A distant sound of singing was heard as he drew nearer, and soon he found himself passing with the multitude into a great prayer-meeting. The music grew more distinct as he went in. A man was singing in clear, penetrating tones:

"What means this eager, anxious throng,
Which moves with busy haste along;
These wondrous gatherings day by day;
What means this strange commotion, say?
In accents hushed the throng reply,
'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by!'"

John had but a vague idea of religion, yet something in the singing affected him; and, weary and footsore and heartsore as he was, he sank into a seat and listened with absorbed attention:

"Jesus! 'tis he who once below
Man's pathway trod in toil and woe;
And burdened ones where'er he came
Brought out their sick and deaf and lame.
The blind rejoiced to hear the cry,
'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by!'"

"Ho, all ye heavy-laden, come!
Here's pardon, comfort, rest, and home.
Ye wanderers from a Father's face,
Return, accept his proffered grace.
Ye tempted ones, there's refuge nigh--
'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by!'"

A plain man, who spoke the language of plain working-men, now arose and read from his Bible the words which the angel of old spoke to the shepherds of Bethlehem:

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

The man went on to speak of this with an intense practical earnestness that soon made John feel as if *he*, individually, were being talked to; and the purport of the speech was this: that God had sent to him, John Morley, a Saviour to save him from his sins, to lift him above his weakness, to help him overcome his bad

habits; that His name was called Jesus, because he shall save his people *from their sins*. John listened with a strange new thrill. This was what he needed--a Friend, all- powerful, all-pitiful, who would undertake for him and help him to overcome himself--for he sorely felt how weak he was. Here was a Friend that could have compassion on the ignorant and them that were out of the way. The thought brought tears to his eyes and a glow of hope to his heart. What if He *would* help him? for deep down in John's heart, worse than cold or hunger or weariness, was the dreadful conviction that he was a doomed man, that he should drink again as he had drunk, and never come to good, but fall lower and lower, and drag all who loved him down with him.

And was this mighty Saviour given to him?

"Yes," cried the man who was speaking; "to *you*; to you, who have lost name and place; to you, that nobody cares for; to you, who have been down in the gutter. God has sent you a Saviour to take you up out of the mud and mire, to wash you clean, to give you strength to overcome your sins, and lead you home to his blessed kingdom. This is the glad tidings of great joy that the angels brought on the first Christmas day. Christ was *God's Christmas gift* to a poor, lost world, and you may have him now, to-day. He may be your own Saviour--yours as much as if there were no other one on earth to be saved. He is looking for you to-day, coming after you, seeking you; he calls you by me. Oh, accept him now!"

There was a deep breathing of suppressed emotion as the speaker sat down, a pause of solemn stillness.

A faint strain of music was heard, and the singer began singing a pathetic ballad of a lost sheep and of the Shepherd going forth to seek it:

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold--
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"'Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?'
But the Shepherd made answer: 'Tis of mine
Has wandered away from me;
And although the road be rough and steep
I go to the desert to find my sheep.'"

John heard with an absorbed interest. All around him were eager listeners, breathless, leaning forward with intense attention. The song went on:

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord went through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry--
Sick and helpless, and ready to die."

There was a throbbing pathos in the intonation, and the verse floated over the weeping throng; when, after a pause, the strain was taken up triumphantly:

"But all through the mountains thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There rose a cry to the gates of heaven,
'Rejoice! I have found my sheep!'
And the angels echoed around the throne,
'Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!'"

All day long, poor John had felt so lonesome! Nobody cared for him; nobody wanted him; everything was against him; and, worst of all, he had no faith in himself. But here was this Friend, *seeking* him, following him through the cold alleys and crowded streets. In heaven they would be glad to hear that he had become a good man. The thought broke down all his pride, all his bitterness; he wept like a little child; and the Christmas gift of Christ--the sense of a real, present, loving, pitying Saviour--came into his very *soul*.

He went homeward as one in a dream. He passed the drinking-saloon without a thought or wish of drinking. The expulsive force of a new emotion had for the time driven out all temptation. Raised above weakness, he thought only of this Jesus, this Saviour from sin, who he now believed had followed him and found him, and he longed to go home and tell his wife what great things the Lord had done for him.

SCENE V.

Meanwhile a little drama had been acting in John's humble home. His wife had been to the shop that day and come home with the pittance for her work in her hands.

"I'll pay you full price to-day, but we can't pay such prices any longer," the man had said over the counter as he paid her. "Hard times-- work dull--we are cutting down all our work-folks; you'll have to take a third less next time."

"I'll do my best," she said meekly, as she took her bundle of work and turned wearily away, but the invisible arm of the Shining One was round her, and the words again thrilled through her that she had read that morning: "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight." She saw no earthly helper; she heard none and felt none, and yet her soul was sustained, and she came home in peace.



When she opened the door of her little room she drew back astonished at the sight that presented itself. A brisk fire was roaring in the stove, and the tea-kettle was sputtering and sending out clouds of steam. A table with a white cloth on it was drawn out before the fire, and a new tea set of pure white cups and saucers, with teapot, sugar-bowl, and creamer, complete, gave a festive air to the whole. There were bread, and butter, and ham-sandwiches, and a Christmas cake all frosted, with little blue and red and green candles round it ready to be lighted, and a bunch of hot-house flowers in a pretty little vase in the centre.

A new stuffed rocking-chair stood on one side of the stove, and there sat Miss Florence De Witt, our young princess of Scene First, holding little Elsie in her lap, while the broad, honest countenance of Betty was beaming with kindness down on the delighted face of Tottie. Both children were dressed from head to foot in complete new suits of clothes, and Elsie was holding with tender devotion a fine doll, while Tottie rejoiced in a horse and cart which he was maneuvering under Betty's superintendence.

The little princess had pleased herself in getting up all this tableau. Doing good was a novelty to her, and she plunged into it with the zest of a new amusement. The amazed look of the poor woman, her dazed expressions of rapture and incredulous joy, the shrieks and cries of confused delight with which the little ones met their mother, delighted her more than any scene she had ever witnessed at the opera--with this added grace, unknown to her, that at this scene the invisible Shining Ones were pleased witnesses.

She had been out with Betty, buying here and there whatever was wanted,-- and what was *not* wanted for those who had been living so long without work or

money?

She had their little coal-bin filled, and a nice pile of wood and kindlings put behind the stove. She had bought a nice rocking-chair for the mother to rest in. She had dressed the children from head to foot at a ready-made clothing store, and bought them toys to their hearts' desire, while Betty had set the table for a Christmas feast.

And now she said to the poor woman at last:

"I'm so sorry John lost his place at father's. He was so kind and obliging, and I always liked him; and I've been thinking, if you'd get him to sign the pledge over again from Christmas Eve, never to touch another drop, I'll get papa to take him back. I always do get papa to do what I want, and the fact is, he hasn't got anybody that suited him so well since John left. So you tell John that I mean to go surety for him; he certainly won't fail *me*. Tell him *I trust him*." And Miss Florence pulled out a paper wherein, in her best round hand, she had written out again the temperance pledge, and dated it "*Christmas Eve, 1875*."

"Now, you come with John to-morrow morning, and bring this with his name to it, and you'll see what I'll do!" and, with a kiss to the children, the little good fairy departed, leaving the family to their Christmas Eve.

What that Christmas Eve was, when the husband and father came home with the new and softened heart that had been given him, who can say? There were joyful tears and solemn prayers, and earnest vows and purposes of a new life heard by the Shining Ones in the room that night.

"And the angels echoed around the throne,
Rejoice! for the Lord brings back his own."

SCENE VI.

"Now, papa, I want you to give me something special to-day, because it's Christmas," said the little princess to her father, as she kissed and wished him "Merry Christmas" next morning.

"What is it, Pussy--half of my kingdom?"

"No, no, papa; not so much as that. It's a little bit of my own way that I want."

"Of course; well, what is it?"

"Well, I want you to take John back again."

Her father's face grew hard.

"Now, please, papa, don't say a word till you have heard me. John was a capital gardener; he kept the green-house looking beautiful; and this Mike that we've

got now, he's nothing but an apprentice, and stupid as an owl at that! He'll never do in the world."

"All that is very true," said Mr. De Witt, "but *John drinks*, and I *won't* have a drinking man."

"But, papa, I mean to take care of that. I've written out the temperance pledge, and dated it, and got John to sign it, and *here it is*," and she handed the paper to her father, who read it carefully, and sat turning it in his hands while his daughter went on:

"You ought to have seen how poor, how very poor they were. His wife is such a nice, quiet, hardworking woman, and has two such pretty children. I went to see them and carry them Christmas things yesterday, but it's no good doing anything if John can't get work. She told me how the poor fellow had been walking the streets in the cold, day after day, trying everywhere, and nobody would take him. It's a dreadful time now for a man to be out of work, and it isn't fair his poor wife and children should suffer. Do try him again, papa!"

"John always did better with the pineapples than anybody we have tried," said Mrs. De Witt at this point. "He is the only one who really understands pineapples."

At this moment the door opened, and there was a sound of chirping voices in the hall. "Please, Miss Florence," said Betty, "the little folks says they wants to give you a Christmas." She added in a whisper: "They thinks much of giving you something, poor little things--plaze take it of 'em." And little Tottie at the word marched in and offered the young princess his dear, beautiful, beloved string of glass beads, and Elsie presented the cross of red berries--most dear to her heart and fair to her eyes. "We wanted to give *you something*" she said bashfully.

"Oh, you lovely dears!" cried Florence; "how sweet of you! I shall keep these beautiful glass beads always, and put the cross up over my dressing-table. I thank you *ever* so much!"

"Are those John's children?" asked Mr. De Witt, winking a tear out of his eye--he was at bottom a soft-hearted old gentleman.

"Yes, papa," said Florence, caressing Elsie's curly hair,--"see how sweet they are!"

"Well--you may tell John I'll try him again." And so passed Florence's Christmas, with a new, warm sense of joy in her heart, a feeling of something in the world to be done, worth doing.

"How much joy one can give with a little money!" she said to herself as she counted over what she had spent on her Christmas. Ah yes! and how true that "It

is more blessed to give than to receive." A shining, invisible hand was laid on her head in blessing as she lay down that night, and a sweet sense of a loving presence stole like music into her soul. Unknown to herself, she had that day taken the first step out of self-life into that life of love and care for others which brought the King of Glory down to share earth's toils and sorrows. And that precious experience was Christ's Christmas gift to her.

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