

**W**HAT an ideal Christmas Eve!" exclaimed Dr. Wentworth as he plodded his homeward way through the fast falling snow, "and what a happy one for Ruth and the child. Indeed, I have much to be thankful for and in the future, I must show my gratitude to the Lord by answering my wife's prayer to be more particular about my religious duties." This determination served to make him even more light-hearted and he quickened his pace that he might sooner feel the comforts of his happy home.

He entered his house and was about to call his six-year old son to come and greet him when his wife came running towards him with tears streaming down her cheeks. It took but a moment for her to tell her story. Little Dick had gone out early in the afternoon and, though it was now three hours since his departure, he had not as yet returned. The doctor did his best to calm his agitated wife. With a firm step, though his face was pale, he walked over to the telephone and informed the police of the child's disappearance. He then rushed out into the night to search for his son.

Dick's disobedience in leaving home alone that afternoon, without his mother's permission was not due to any desire for mischief, but rather that he might use the pennies he had saved to buy Christmas presents for his parents. As he was passing a street corner on his way to the business section of the city, he suddenly collided with a very dark-haired, thick-set, roughly clad man who immediately stopped him and inquired his name.

"My name's Richard John Wentworth but daddy calls me Dicky," answered the boy manfully.

"Not the kid of that big bug they call Dr. Wentworth, be ye, lad?" asked the man, suddenly interested.

"Yes, my dad's name is Dr. Wentworth and I'm going up town to buy Christmas presents for him and mother."

The man gazed intently on the boy's face for a few moments before he muttered half-aloud, "The price I'll get out of the Doctor is worth all the chances I'll take!"

"I'll have to get the kid a long ways out of this burg, though, for his father'll search every nook and corner of the town to find him."

Taking the child's small delicate hand in his large rough one, he said, "See here, sonny, I saw your dad down at the depot a few minutes ago and he told me to come up here and bring you down there to see the pony that just came off the train. I think it's a Christmas present for you. You'd better hurry up so's not to keep him waiting."

The unsuspecting child, too excited even to doubt the story, hastened with his rough companion to the depot. Arriving there the man mentioned something about the Doctor's being on the train upon which he forthwith lifted the child. He then led the way into a secluded corner of the last car and bade the boy sit down on the cushioned seat. Watching his chance he suddenly pressed his handkerchief, upon which he had previously poured chloroform, close to the child's nose with the result that the latter immediately fell into a deep sleep. The kidnapper with a smile of satisfaction sank into the seat beside his victim.

Although it was late that night when Dr. Wentworth returned home, his wife was waiting up for him. It was needless for her to ask if the search had been successful for her husband's actions answered the unasked question. Entering the library he threw himself wearily into a chair and sat looking into the fire, his face drawn and haggard, his eyes dull and uninterested in what they beheld. No word was spoken between them till the clock struck the hour of twelve announcing that the anniversary of Christ's nativity was at hand. When the echo of the last stroke had died away, Mrs. Wentworth, leaning towards her husband, placed her hand on his shoulder and said, "John, it is Christmas morning. Let us pray together to the Infant Child at Bethlehem that, *if it be His Holy Will*, He will bring our child back to us!"

Dr. Wentworth sprang from his chair as though it were hot and stood before his wife. His eyes were no longer dull for they now flashed anger; the apparently lifeless hands of a moment ago were clenched so

firmly that the nails cut into the flesh ; his pale cheek was now a scarlet red while the veins on his forehead swelled almost to bursting. He stood for a moment quivering with emotion and then broke into a volley of complaints against what he considered an unjust God. His wife tried to check the flow of blasphemy but all to no avail for he motioned her to be silent and said, "What ! you want me to pray that His Will be done even though He does not will that our child be returned to us. No ! unless the boy is given back to me, I will henceforward put God entirely out of my life."

And he kept his word. For as time went on and Dick's whereabouts were still unknown to his parents, the Doctor became more and more bitter against God. He was not satisfied with his own abandonment of religion but he also tried to persuade his wife to do likewise. When he saw that his efforts were all to no avail, he now attacked the Church of God and entirely alienated himself from all religion. The good natured, sympathetic doctor of a short time ago was a different person altogether from this heartless, cynical man. But Mrs. Wentworth only redoubled her prayers and trusted in God.

How long he slept Dick never knew, but when he awoke, it was to find himself half-buried in the snow amid the ruins of the train. All about were the former occupants of the ill-fated train, some of them already dead, while others were giving vent to their sufferings by moans and shrieks. This, mingling with the noise of the wind blowing through the nearby trees, made the most dismal sound imaginable. The child attempted to raise himself but the effort cost him so much pain that he uttered a cry and fell back unconscious. On hearing the cry two men came running towards the child. The first to reach him was a tall, broad shouldered man with a very young looking face though his hair was as white as the snow about him. When he bent over the boy, his face which usually wore a broad smile, now showed plainly the concern and sympathy which he felt for little Dick.

"Is he dead, Doctor?" asked the priest,—for such he was—as the other felt the child's pulse.



"Not as yet, Father O'Regan, " though he soon will be, if we do not get him out of this," was the laconic answer.

"We cannot let the poor little lad die like this. I'll take him home and mother will look after him." Then as the priest gathered the child in his arms, he exclaimed, "My ! what a pretty face, is it a child or an angel?" He then set out at a brisk walk towards the nearby parochial house. For several days little Dick's life kept straining at the frail cord which bound it to this earth. But the best of medical skill and the prayers of his new friends at last triumphed and on New Year's Eve the crisis was passed.

Though his injuries were not slow in mending, the child's memory had partly deserted him. He remembered his name and was able to describe his father and mother—but that was all. Dick, being in such an uncertain state of mind, it is not surprising that the kidnapper, whose disfigured body was found close to the child's, was believed by the priest to be the boy's father. When Dick was strong enough he was informed of the fact that his "father" was dead, which news caused him to stare at the priest with wondering eyes before he burst into tears. Father O'Regan was also forced to add to his sorrows by telling him that the search to find his home had proved fruitless but that in the future he would live with his benefactor.

For the next few years, Dick's life was indeed a happy one. The priest's mother took him to her heart from the night he was brought unconscious to her son's house and so it is no wonder that, in four years time when Dick was preparing to make his first Holy Communion, it was hard to find a better boy.

At last the great day arrived when Father O'Regan's well trained band of children including our own little hero, marched up to the altar rail to receive for the first time the King of Kings. As the priest placed the Sacred Host on Dick's tongue, he noticed a strange, almost heavenly expression on the boy's face. As soon as the service was over he sought the boy and took him to one side to speak to him. Before he could begin, Dick whispered to him to come to some more

private place as he had something to talk about. As soon as they were alone, the boy told what seemed to be almost incredible.

"Father!" exclaimed he happily, "I remember all now. That man who was killed was not my father but a big, rough fellow who took me to the depot, lifted me to the train, and after that I remember nothing."

Dick went on telling the wondering priest how, suddenly, immediately after he had received Holy Communion, everything came back to him. He told the name of his native city, his father's name and all about his former home. Father O'Regan wondered at the ways of God. The good priest spoke to the child a few moments, telling him to thank God for manifold blessings and ended by saying:

"Well, run along now, Dicky, tomorrow I'll take you home."

The boy noticing the sorrow of the priest's voice, threw his arms around his neck and then ran to hide his own tears.

Left alone, Father O'Regan knelt before the picture "Christ in Gethsemani" and with tears in his eyes, tried to pray.

"Father, take not the child from me, but not my will but Thine, Oh Lord, be done."

It was late in the afternoon of the next day when Father O'Regan with his little charge mounted the steps of the latter's former home, only to find that the Doctor was out of the city but that Mrs. Wentworth was at home. The meeting was indeed a happy one for mother and son. At first, Mrs. Wentworth was so happy that she could think of nothing else but her boy but when she had heard the priest's story and had told her own, she began to look at the matter in a new light. A strange fear was tearing at her heart. Would her husband allow the child to be reared a Catholic or would he make him a Godless man like himself? She voiced her fears and Father O'Regan admitted that the chances were against the child's religion. Mrs. Wentworth fought a short but decisive battle with herself before she made a peculiar request of the priest. She asked him to take her child back to his own home and to

bring him up a good Catholic. Then if the Lord so willed that he should one day be a priest, he could come back and with God's help convert his father. Dick protested but little. His love and admiration for Father O'Regan and his high office had grown so strong that he often expressed his desire to follow in the good father's footsteps. Thus it was settled that Dick should return to his second home with the understanding that his mother would sometimes visit him.

Her son had come and gone. It all seemed like a dream. Mrs Wentworth hastened to the church to seek consolation from her one Friend. From the depths of her suffering soul she cried out to God to find some way to give her back her child but her prayer ended with the words, "Not my will but Thine, Oh Lord, be done."

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Fifteen years had passed. It was again Christmastide and only lacked three weeks of the great feast. The snow, which had been falling all day, now covered the ground like an immaculate veil. The jingling of the sleigh bells, the gleeful shouts of the children as they playfully threw snow-balls and the joyful whistle of the news-boys all mingled to make the scene one of unsurpassable happiness.

Dr. Wentworth sat in his library gazing into the fire. His thoughts were none too pleasant for he hated this season of the year on account of the bitter memories it brought to his mind. For the past twenty years he had gone through life with no ambition, no happiness in living and often he was tempted to end it all and it is probable he would have done so had it not been for his wife. Her life too had been sad but she had something to console her, and he was aware what that something was. True to his promise, he had forsaken his God while his wife found consolation by bringing her sorrows to the feet of the Divine One. Several times his better nature suggested that he reconcile his soul to God—but pride always conquered and so Dr. Wentworth not only lost his son but likewise his faith.



His reflections were suddenly interrupted by the ringing of the telephone which he answered only half realizing what he was doing. The call was to come as quickly as possible to a nearby street where a man had been run down by an automobile. Arriving at the scene of the accident, the doctor found that the victim had been carried into a drug store where he had been placed on a couch in a rear apartment. Seeing that the man was unconscious, the Doctor made a hurried examination of the injuries before he particularly noticed the stranger's countenance. He then gazed at the stricken figure before him, noting the clerical garb and the face which was not unlike his own. He began to search the priest's pockets and finally found the identification card upon which was written: "Rev. Richard J. Wentworth, Milwaukee." The Doctor restrained his emotions as best he could and commanded the wondering proprietor thus, "Have my son conveyed at once to the hospital."

All that night, the Doctor and his wife sat by their son's bed-side listening to his ravings. His father learned of the kidnapping, the train wreck, the rescue by Father O'Regan and then began the story of his life with the kind priest. He told of his school life, of his boyhood days with the priest and of his ambition to become a priest, of his visit home and his mother's sacrifice and of his college and seminary life. He also spoke of the appointment of Father O'Regan as Bishop of the Diocese in which was the city of his early home of which he now seemed to remember every detail.

He accounted for his presence in his native city by telling his mother's wish that as soon as he should become a priest, he would come home; and as he had only been ordained a few days previous, he was on his way to carry this out when the accident occurred. Then his talk became wild. He called for his parents and his benefactor, Bishop O'Regan. The doctors in whose hands the father had left the case, shook their heads gravely and candidly told the parents that the injured man would hardly live through the crisis.

Mrs. Wentworth crossed to the side of the bed where her husband stood and laying her hand on his

shoulder, just as she had on that memorable night twenty years ago, and feeling that her prayers were at last to be answered, she said, "Come, John, repeat after me those words which you refused to say on that other occasion when God was pleased to take our son from us."

The doctor with a stiffened groan sank to his knees and repeated the words after his wife: "Oh Lord, spare my child, but not my will but Thine be done."

A few moments later, Father Wentworth opened his eyes and, seeing his parents kneeling at his bedside, exclaimed, "Father! Mother! Thank God!"

The recovery of Father Wentworth aided, no doubt, by the happy reunion with his parents, was so speedy that on Christmas Eve, he was able to sing his first High Mass at midnight in his humble though neat little church. As Dr. Wentworth entered the house of God after an absence of almost twenty years, he felt as though he had found what he had lost. He was happier than he had ever been in his life before and, being fully aware of the injustice of his actions, he was determined to make amends.

When the proper time came, Dr. Wentworth, at the side of his wife advanced to the altar rail to receive the Bread of Life from the hands of his own son.

"Father, I thank Thee!" murmured Mrs. Wentworth as at last she saw her prayer answered.

"Father, I thank Thee!" the priest's heart was too full to say more as he mounted the altar steps after the distribution of Holy Communion.

"Father, I thank Thee!" prayed Dr. Wentworth from the depths of his happy, peaceful soul.

C. N. Hughes, '20.

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The most popular man is sometimes of little repute after he is gone; and the least popular now in this world of conflict, come out in history with a veneration unknown before.—Cardinal Manning.