

Chester Barry's Christmas.

THE big clock in the department store rang out the hour of noon and, as the echo of its last stroke died away, Chester Barry donned his coat and cap and proceeded on his way to dinner. It was just two days before Christmas and Chester's heart was unusually light, for his employer had promised him a week's holidays and he had planned to spend Christmas with his mother and his two little sisters, who lived in the town of Hazelton some two hundred miles distant.

Eighteen months previous to this he was one of a happy family group living in that little town, but misfortune had found its way into their home. His father, who was employed on the construction of a large grain elevator, had met with an accident which caused his death, and Chester, a bright boy of fourteen years, in order to assist his mother, who bravely undertook the problem of supporting her little family, had come to Winnipeg where he secured employment in the stores of the Hudson Bay Company. His wages were low and it was only by practising the strictest economy that he was able to send his mother the small sum of three dollars a week which, together with her own earnings, enabled her to procure the necessaries of life for herself and her little daughters. During the past three months Chester had been more frugal than ever and had succeeded in saving a sum of money sufficient to purchase an excursion ticket to his home town.

As he skipped along the street that cold December day, he revolved in his mind the happenings of those eighteen long, dreary months. Was it, he asked himself, really but eighteen months since he had left home? It seemed to him like eighteen years. He remembered well the morning he had kissed his mother good-bye and set out for the great unknown city of Winnipeg. He fancied he could still see her standing on the platform at the little station, and hear her fond "God bless you dear," as the train pulled out. A great lump rose in his throat, for Chester had always been "Mother's

boy." Then he thought how pleased his mother would be to see him and how his little sisters would greet him, and his heart beat fast with emotion.

Suddenly upon turning the corner of Selkirk and Prince Rupert streets he was accosted by a wretched-looking individual in ragged coat and slouched hat, who laid a trembling hand on his shoulder and said, "Look here sonny can't you help a poor fellow? Everybody else is enjoyin' themselves and I haven't got nothin' to eat nor rags to keep me from freesin'." Chester, realizing that he had just enough money to buy his railway ticket, was about to pass on when the man, with a look of despair, exclaimed "You would see me starve then—would you? Well, the river will end all," and he pointed with a long bony finger to where the cold waters of the Assinaboine hurried on to join the Red river. A shudder ran through Chester's frame as he realized the significance of these words. Yet, what could he do? If he gave money to this man he must sacrifice his long-cherished visit. Could he do it? Could he, for the sake of that wretched creature, forego the pleasure of spending his holidays with his mother and sisters? No, he decided, he could not. But then the still small voice of conscience spoke, Could he make the sacrifice for God's sake? He stood for a moment, wrapped in thought. A terrible conflict was raging in his soul. He looked at the beggar and his boyish heart was filled with compassion. Then he raised his eyes to the cross which surmounted the cathedral tower on the opposite side of the street. Instantly he made up his mind. Yes, for God's sake he could and would make the sacrifice. Putting his hand in his pocket, he drew out his purse. It contained two five dollar bills and one of these he handed to the beggar saying, "Here, this will get you something to eat, and perhaps my boss can give you a job." The beggar took the money, thanked him and was gone, and Chester proceeded to the restaurant where he was accustomed to dine. The gaiety and buoyancy had fled from his soul, yet he was not sad, for the thought that he had assisted a fellow-creature in need gave him con-

solation and robbed his disappointment of its bitterest sting.

He ate his meal in silence and started on return to his work. As he was passing one of the numerous bar-rooms which line Selkirk street, three drunken men emerged from the door, and Chester recognized, in the central figure, the wretched creature whom he had befriended. For a moment the blood stood still in his veins. Then his heart throbbed wildly and a flood of conflicting emotions rushed through his brain. Sorrow, disappointment, disgust, anger, vexation each in turn held sway. "This," he said to himself, "is what has become of my hard-earned money. It has done more harm than good," and he feared that he had been, in a measure, the cause of this wretch's sin. Then he reasoned that the Good God, for Whose sake he had made the sacrifice, does not judge our acts by the fruits which they produce but only by the motives which prompt them, and, with this thought in his mind, he entered the store and soon was busily engaged waiting on the customers who crowded round his counter.

That evening, as he left the store, the thought of his disappointment was uppermost in his mind, but he endeavoured to banish it and looked about for something to occupy his attention. A short distance ahead of him was a gentleman in grey coat and soft felt hat whom Chester recognized as one of the prominent bankers of Winnipeg. As the man passed in front of Davison's brilliantly-lighted drug store he pulled out his handkerchief and Chester noticed some dark object drop to the pavement. When he reached the spot he discovered it was a purse and, picking it up, he started in pursuit of the gentleman whom he soon overtook. "Excuse me, sir," said Chester, "but this is your purse. You dropped it when you pulled out your handkerchief in front of the drug store." The man was quite surprised. He took the purse, thanked Chester most heartily, and, pressing a five dollar gold piece into his hand, passed on, leaving Chester standing on the street corner, somewhat dazed by this sudden change in his fortunes. All the long-cherished hopes and desires which he had so nobly sacrificed that

day now returned with renewed strength, and he felt as if a burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He was, thus, in a position to attain the object of those desires and accordingly the following morning found him seated in one of the coaches of the west-bound express.

One frosty evening, about a week after Chester had returned from Hazelton, where he had spent his Christmas holiday, he called at the Red Cross hospital to visit a friend who was taken ill during his absence. As he passed through the crowded ward, his gaze fell upon a face which he recognized as that of the beggar to whom he had given the five dollars on the street corner. He was about to pass on when the man opened his eyes and motioned him to come near. Chester approached the bedside and inquired what the trouble was. For answer, the sufferer grasped his hand and looking him straight in the eyes said; "Forgive me boy. I have wronged you I squandered your money for drink. While staggering about the street intoxicated I was struck by an auto and the next thing I knew I was here in the hospital with a broken leg. During the two weeks I have been lying here, I have come to see the folly of my past life and have resolved that I shall never allow another drop of liquor to pass my lips. What is your name my boy?" "Chester Barry;—and yours." "My name is Jack Williams, I come of a respectable family but I was always 'The black sheep.'" Chester spoke a few words of encouragement to him and then passed out of the ward.

Three weeks later Jack Williams, through Chester's influence, secured a job in the warehouses of The Hudson Bay Company, where he has proved himself to be a sober, industrious workman. He is still employed there and, each year, he sends a five dollar check, as a Christmas gift, to Chester who is now located in Brandon, being manager of a branch house of The Hudson Bay Co.

E. L. D. '16.