

ments of celebrant and acolytes; the joyous decoration and splendor of the altar; above all, the fervor and devotion, which cast gleams of glory over the faces of the young worshippers, filled Frank with wonder and delight. But hardly did he take his eyes for a moment from the pretty Bethlehem crib. Quite naturally he joined his little hands in prayer for the first time, and begged the sweet Infant Who so loved little children to enrich him with feelings of kindness and good-will towards all his fellow-creatures.

As the students, at the end of the ceremonies, were descending the stairs to the refectory, Percy, catching up with Frank, clapped him on the back.

"Happy Christmas, Frank!"

"Oh, it *is* happy! I never felt so happy in all my life. Percy, your religion is mine. It's all so nice. Say: let's stop here on the stairs a moment. I want to catch Donnel and Keenan, and Harry and Tom."

Percy called these as they were passing.

Schoolboy-like, and Christmas-like, they were all happy and smiling, shaking hands with each other heartily, and speaking from full hearts those pretty words, so fitting to the time, so sweetened by precious memories.

"Boys," said Frank, earnestly, when he had at length secured their attention, "I've been praying at the Infant Jesus; and I want to join your religion. I'll never wish I was dead again; and if Buck were drowning in the river," concluded the little mite, impressively, "I'd jump right in and save him!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL.

IT was a joyful breakfast that Christmas morning. Loud were the exclamations of pleasure and pleased surprise, as each boy, on lifting his plate, found beneath it a pretty Christmas-card.

"It never happened before," remarked Harry Quip, who had been attending St. Maure's for three years. "Mr. Middleton is always getting up some nice surprise. He's a trump!"

"It makes the place so like home," Joe Whyte observed.

"But isn't it a glorious Christmas morning?" exclaimed Willie Ruthers. "The snow is falling so nicely. A Christmas without snow is like a story without an end."

"Or bread without butter," put in Joe.

"Or an angel without wings," added Donnel, who presided over this cheerful table.

"Or a cat without its meow!" chuckled Harry.

All the other tables were accommodating an equally jolly company. Loud praises of Mr. Middleton, merry greetings, jokes and jests flew from mouth to mouth; while above the din could be heard the musical voice of Percy, and the shrill, piercing laugh of Frankie Burdock, for the nonce the lightest heart of all. It was indeed a merry Christmas.

Breakfast ended, Mr. Middleton announced that the Christmas-boxes from home were all awaiting the inspection of their owners in the study-hall. Then reading out the names of those whose boxes had arrived—with the exception of Frank and a very few others, all were on the list—he requested the happy proprietors not to eat any of the good things till the regular hour set apart for this purpose—ten o'clock of the forenoon. This visit extraordinary, he explained, was simply allowed for the purpose of gratifying a natural and legitimate curiosity.

Forthwith there was a tremendous hurrying, pushing, and crowding, each boy striving to be the first out of the refectory. The exodus, it must be confessed, was rather disorderly. Mr. Middleton remained calm, however. "Christmas," he reflected, "comes but once a year."

When Frank had succeeded in making his way through the crush at the refectory door, he found Percy, Tom, and Harry awaiting him.

"Come on, old man!" cried Tom; "we want you to help us look at our boxes."

"There's none for me," Frank made answer in a sad tone. "My papa doesn't believe in Christmas yet. He'll never think of sending me a Christmas-box. But he's just as kind as can be. No; I don't care about going up."

"Frank, do come," pleaded Percy in his most persuasive accents. "Half the pleasure of opening my box will be gone if you don't come along."

"Same way with me," said Tom.

"Me too," added Harry.

"Then I'll go," said Frank.

They ascended the study-hall stairs. The large room presented a very cheerful appearance indeed. The study-benches had been removed the day previous. On the floor, alongside the wall, were disposed very small boxes and very big boxes and boxes of all sizes between; their owners' names, to avoid mistakes, clearly written on slips of paper pinned upon the wainscot. The boys were in great excitement. Some were tripping hither and thither, looking for their names; others, down on their knees before their discovered property, were feverishly pulling out every conceivable form of present from the Christmas turkey to the Christmas illustrated magazine; others, again, were dancing about their boxes, pleasantly tantalizing themselves as to what were the hidden treasures within: everybody was talking either to his neighbor or, if his neighbor chanced to be over-occupied, to himself. On this occasion, the walls may have had ears; certainly the boys had not.

Percy, with Frank at his side, soon found his box: no difficult matter after all, for it was an enormous box—the largest in the room.

"Oh my! what a big box!" Frank observed.

"Well, you see I've got ten sisters," explained Percy, merrily, as he stooped and threw back the cover, "and every one of them has to put in her particular gift. They're nice girls: they're so fond of me."

The box proved to be a veritable curiosity-shop: books in pretty holiday binding, magazines with colored engravings, exquisite Christmas-cards, gloves, shoes, a sealskin cap, ear-muffs, silk scarfs, neck-ties, boxes of fine French candy, the tradi-

tional turkey, cakes, fruit, nuts—my pen in putting them down is getting weary.

As these gifts emerged from their obscurity, Frank's eyes opened very wide; he was as fully delighted that they were for Percy as though they were all for himself, and, momentarily throwing off his old-fashioned ways, he broke into cheers and danced about the box.

"Look, Frank, look! I knew there was something for you," said Percy, taking up the prettiest of the silken scarfs, and attempting to put it around Frank's neck. But the lad drew back.

"No, no," he piped, "it's yours; everything's yours."

"But this is for you, Frank."

"Prove it! prove it!" cried the infant logician.

"If you don't take this scarf," said Percy, ceasing to smile, "I'll not enjoy my box near so much. See! there's a whole lot of scarfs; I don't want them all."

Frank suffered himself to be persuaded; and Percy in his dainty way adjusted the gift about his little friend's neck in the most approved taste. Notwithstanding his refusal at first, Frank was very proud of his present, and could not conceal his happiness. His bright chestnut eyes sparkled with pleasure, as he tripped across the room to show Tom his acquisition.

"Why, old man, what's this? You're a regular out-and-out dude."

"Don't care a snap what I am. It's from Percy."

"But what's the matter with your jacket-

pockets?" asked Tom, gravely. "They look queer."

"What is it, Tom? Are they torn?"

"Come here: I'll show you."

Frank drew nearer, and Tom, catching him in a firm hold, proceeded to fill his pockets with candy, nuts, and raisins.

"Now they look all right—as round and as large as the moon when it's full."

"Come back here, Frank," interrupted Percy, "I want you."

Frank, in great glee, skipped across to Percy.

"Here's something else for you, Frank. Oh, you needn't draw back. It's a prayer-book, and I have three already. You'll need one, you know, if you want to 'get religion.'"

Frank was too delighted for words. He took the beautiful silver-clasped book of devotion, opened it with eagerness, and ran over page after page. Presently a picture fell out.

"Oh! Oh! Look!" he exclaimed, picking it up. "If it isn't the stable at Bethlehem, and the Little Babe Who loved children! Isn't it nice! Here, Percy, you take it; it's yours."

"No, indeed," Percy made answer, "it's for you. Everything in the book is for you. It's my Christmas gift for little Frank."

"I'll be big some day," answered Frank, seriously, "and then I intend to give you a house and lot, with a carriage, and a coachman in a cocked hat and gold buttons on his coat."

"And what'll you give Tom?" asked Percy, struggling to keep a straight face.

"I'll give him a bag of gold."

Frank was precocious; but in many things he was far from being an "old man."

Word went round among the boys that "little Frank," as they called him, had not received a Christmas-box. This was enough to awaken their sympathies. Donnel, Keenan, Richards, and indeed a host of the students, were soon upon him with every imaginable species of confectionery. Frank had his breath fairly taken away by their kindness. That his papa should shower attentions upon him was a matter which he had been brought up to expect. But that these boys, comparative strangers to him, should be lavish of kind words and gifts was something he could scarcely realize. In sheer self-protection from their exuberance of kindness, he made his escape from the study-hall.

For the first time since his arrival in St. Maure's, Percy plotted a practical joke. Calling together Tom, Donnel, Keenan, Quip, and a few others, he thus spoke:

"Boys, I've an idea."

"Hurrah!" said Tom, ironically. "Hear! hear!"

"Poor Frank's father will hardly think of sending him a Christmas-box. Suppose we club together and get up one for him ourselves. He won't think we did it, if we go about it quietly. It'll be a good joke."

"Oh, it's just too funny!" said Harry, solemnly. "But, joke or not, it's just the thing. I've got something that will suit Frank to a dot. My grandma's got the idea that I'm no older now than when I last saw her. I was seven then."

"Your grandma is perfectly right," muttered Tom in parenthesis.

"Well, anyhow, she's sent me an immense picture-book with all kinds of fairy tales told in words of not more than two syllables. It's the very thing for Frank."

"That is," interposed Keenan, "if you're willing to give it up. It's just what you need, you know. For my part, I'll undertake to supply a box of candy."

"And I," said Donnel, "a turkey. But I won't starve, all the same. I'll live on your turkey, George."

Before the boys had finished declaring what they should give of their abundance, Tom, who had left them for a moment, entered with a large box. Forthwith, in went candy, oranges, cakes, turkey, books, and what not. In a short time, there awaited Frank a box in no wise inferior to the best in the hall.

And so, when ten o'clock had come, Frank was informed by Mr. Kane, who enjoyed the confidence of the conspirators, that something had arrived for him too. Frank dashed off to the study-hall; and it was indeed ludicrous, a moment later, to see him running about among his friends, and insisting on their taking a share of the good things. In some cases, the generous lads were fairly forced by the ardent Frank to receive what they themselves had given.

The day, it is almost needless to remark, passed very happily; and at night a climax of enjoyment was reached when Dickens' famous Christmas Carol of Scrooge & Marley (dramatized by one of the professors) was played before faculty and students.

In the opening scene, Frank, who had had no previous theatrical experience, created quite a diversion. He had been listening for some time, with ill-concealed indignation, to Scrooge's remarks; but when that hard-handed, griping, business-machine said with great disdain: "Christmas!—Humbug!" Frank could restrain himself no longer.

Mounting his chair, he stamped his foot, and angrily shook his diminutive fist at the brutal miser.

"It's a lie, you old Scrooge! And you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're a wicked—"

The rest of the sentence was cut short by the energetic action of Tom, who, catching the indignant orator's feet, brought him down rather suddenly.

Amidst the roar that greeted this diversion, Tom and Percy explained to Frank the nature and object of plays in general; which so cleared that young gentleman's mind that he presently expressed himself satisfied, and implied that he had no objections to the performances going on.

In the dormitory that night, Frank, before retiring to rest, knelt down after the manner of his friends, and, placing before him the picture of the Nativity, clasped his hands in prayer. An hour later, Mr. Middleton, noticing that the child manifested no disposition to retire, thought it well to put an end to these lengthy devotions. On advancing to Frank's side, however, he found that the kneeling lad, worn out with the pleasures and emotions of the day, was peacefully sleeping, his lips pressed upon the picture of the "Infant Who loved little children."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE RAILROAD-TRACK.

IT would be a long task to describe in detail the varied amusements of Christmas week. Skating, dancing, the nightly play, in-door games and out-door sport, caused these days to pass on the wings of happiness and mirth.

With all this, little Frank contrived to "get religion" in time and out of time. Just six days after his arrival, he was reduced to tears, and, I regret to state, made quite a show of temper, when his peremptory request that the president should baptize him on the spot was denied. But he soon regained his calmness of demeanor, and, under favor of the president's promise that he should be baptized, once he knew his catechism well by heart, he set to work at the study of this little book with such ardor that Percy could scarcely persuade him to come out skating.

Frank very effectually prevented Mr. Kane and Mr. Middleton from becoming lonesome. No sooner did either of these worthy prefects put in an appearance in the yard than he bore down upon him and played the part of an animated interrogation-point. Like the gentlemen of the courtroom, Frank wanted "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

He was especially hard upon Mr. Middleton.