





WOMEN'S PAGE




A Christmas Story

Once upon a time there was a rich family in our town. The family consisted of the father, mother, and two replacement sons. The father and mother were not young—their two real sons had gone to fight for our country when the first call to arms was sounded. One now slept in Flanders Fields, and the loving mother did not expect to see her firstborn again until the sea gives up its dead.

So when time had healed their grief a little, they went from one orphanage to another until they found two boys who, at least in their own minds, resembled their boys at the age of ten and twelve. They planned to bring these boys up as their own, even in a better fashion, for the years give a perspective for seeing our mistakes and an added ability to correct them.

These boys were just average boys—they craved not to chop wood or to carry coal, but they did do it to help mother, whom they loved beyond anything. They helped father, too, and were proud to be called his sons, albeit he was not to be compared to mother who, when all was said and done, was just perfect. Things ran along much as they do in the ordinary family with its ups and downs. But Christmas was coming! The boys were crossing off the days on the kitchen calendar, and wondering what kind of a Christmas it would be.

They had never had any real, sure-enough Christmas. So one night, when they were pretending to study (remember I said that they were average boys), father came in from the postoffice. After settling himself comfortably, having removed his coat and replaced his shoes with house slippers, he turned to the reading-table and said, "Well, good people, we have to make some plans for Christmas." The boys' hearts skipped several beats. Father and mother exchanged glances; then mother smiled, and said, "Would you all like a tree?" Would they? Well, I should say so!

They talked about trimming the tree, father promising to go out in the woods with the boys on Saturday afternoon to cut a good cedar. When the question of presents came up, father said, "I

reckon you boys have some money saved." At this, William Johns (called 'W. J.' for short) and Justin Bradley, (who even in the home had been termed 'J. B.')

looked kind of sad, for neither had been able to forego the movies.

W. J. extracted seventy-three cents from his fat, little china pig, while J. B. shook out \$1.15 from his iron bank. Mother turned back a corner of the rug, and held up what looked like quite a bank roll to the small boys, but it contained only \$3.38. Father produced a two dollar bill which had been given to him by a man from whom he had never expected to get it. These savings represented the available cash for Christmas.

Now you will think this is strange, for I had said in the beginning that this was a rich family. Well, they were rich in several respects. Kind hearts, we know, are more than coronets, and coronets, we know, are valuable, hard to obtain, and costly to maintain; while simple faith is more than Norman blood. Their faith in the infinite love and care of their Heavenly Father, and their noble act of taking two boys to live with them in their old age was the highest type. Everything of value which this couple had was theirs forever—they paid no insurance on their treasures, for they were stored where moth and rust could not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal.

"Now," said father, "since there are four of us, let's have a four-dollar Christmas." To these boys, who never had had much money, four dollars seemed a big sum. "We will put down the amounts we have," continued father, "and get to work to earn more so that when each one of us has four dollars we can go out and buy our presents. We have the tree and the trimmings, so we are in that much to begin with." "Yes," said mother, "And I have raised the turkey." The boys couldn't see their way clear to earn the necessary amount to make four dollars, but father offered to pay them twenty-five cents an hour to repair the garden fence, clean out the chicken house, and to whitewash the whole thing. J. B. earned seventy-five cents delivering for the bakery shop, so they brightened up at father's offer. The boys agreed that mother should not

be permitted to do anything more, for they would take it upon themselves to earn her share.

By Saturday night the job was finished, and W. J. had earned \$3.30, while J. B.'s share was \$2.60. "Now," said J. B., "we have the home folks fixed, what do you say if we ask father if he will let each of us have a boy from the orphanage spend Christmas with us if we earn four dollars more? We could do without some little presents, and get 'em something nice; we could sleep on that old bed up in the attic and give 'em our room, and part of our money we could give to mother for their board and carfare. You know how we would have liked such a visit; and I know a boy I'd like to ask."

"Well, let's put it up to mother; if she will have them, father won't say a word." So they hunted mother up, unfolded their plan, and she thought it the best ever. They talked about it at supper that night, and father exclaimed, "Hey, what's all this? I want to be in on all the Christmas doin's." The arrangements were explained again, and father insisted on paying the carfare as his share, so the boys voted him a good sport, and said he could have the extra dessert, even though it was not his turn. You see mother served the dessert in five portions, because she said she never knew when father might bring someone home to supper!

It would take me too long to tell you all the things they did to earn the money, but talk about beavers—compared to those two boys beavers are just lying around in the sun. Needless to say they got the money.

Two days before Christmas the whole family went shopping. Among the many purchases was a comb for mother's hair made out of some gray stuff just the color of her hair; sort of silver color, with shiny stones in it. For father they bought a set of travel books, because he enjoyed reading them so much. When he sat down to read travel books he really thought that he was living in the place described in the story; if he was reading about a hot climate, he would wipe the perspiration off his face, and if the story was about a cold place he would get up and put another log on the fire. They also bought mother