

Out of the Marble

(By LOUISE MAY DALTON in *Are Maria*.)

He had not faith. He had not learned it at home; he had not found it in the world. Religion meant nothing to him. If he ever thought of it at all, he called it a cloak, or at best a superstition, so he never tried to put faith into the face of the child. But it was there, unseen.

He had given orders that tramps and beggars should be driven away, but that children should always be made welcome, and, somehow, the children far and near learned this, and ventured into his garden when he sat among the flowers—thinking of the child.

The autumn came, stripping the trees; then the winter, driving the children away—all but the marble infant in the tower, into whose face a holy rapture was coming.

Christmas was near at hand. Old Jane was furtively putting up bits of green and singing quaint carols in a hushed voice. As for the master, he knew that each day had fewer rays of sunlight and that the year was dying, but of the great Nativity he had no thought.

On Christmas Eve the figure of the child was finished. Even the scrupulous solicitude of the sculptor could find no place where the chisel could do more. About the great front doorway there was a niche, long empty, and there he placed the statue, its arms extended, its face shining. Well had the master succeeded, and in the marble face was to be seen all the happiness and wisdom and beauty and goodness that his own visage had lacked.

There was a pleasant bustle within the old house, for the master was coming back. He had sent no message except the few words which said that he would soon be there. There was no need of other warning. There was no wife or child or mother to be glad or sorry; no one but the old servants, and they had been looking for him for many years. And now he was coming.

"There must be a plum-cake for the master," began Jane.

"Plum-cake is it!" exclaimed Andrew. "What will he do with a plum-cake?"

"Eat it."

"He eat a plum-cake! But you know he's a great man. He's celebrated. He's a sculptor."

"I can't help it if he is," said Jane, stubbornly. "Sculptor or not, he's my own boy, and he'll eat my plum-cake. What is a sculptor, anyway?"

"Something grand," replied Andrew, evasively. "A woman couldn't understand."

"Is it a politician?"

"It's greater than that. Politicians are nowhere."

"A sort of nobleman, helike?"

"A powerful nobleman," said Andrew, with a wild guess. "Why a sculptor is almost as big a fellow as a king."

"Oh dear me!" answered Jane. "Is that so? Then maybe he won't eat the plum-

cake, even if it is half raisins. To think of my boy being a sculptor!"

The situation was now in Andrew's hands and he brought forth his advice.

"The best of everything, as if a king was coming, and the flag up on the tower, and the best sheets on his bed."

They met him at the door two little withered people—and Jane put her arms about his neck.

"Welcome, my own dear boy!" she said, and blessed him.

"I have come home to stay, Jane."

They went with him to his room, where a fire of driftwood danced, and where the air was fragrant with the sweet clover that had been renewed every year for two decades.

No painful memories evoked by the surroundings kept him awake that night; no visions of faces loved and lost—there had been no loved faces; no regrets for happy days passed in the old home—there had been no happy days. His childhood had been a blight, his youth a horror, his exile no pain. What he had never known in his home he had hoped to find in the world, but not knowing how or where to search, he had not found it.

Two things he loved—fair shapes in marble and little children. The little ones loved him, and he had achieved some reputation as a sculptor. These were his successes—his only successes. That he had amassed wealth counted for naught with him. And now he had come home, sick, tired, old before his time.

The tower room was his studio, and there he set to work upon the rough blocks which held imprisoned forms, but his cunning seemed gone. The Cupids and Psyche and fauns no longer left the marble at his bidding, and at night he dreamed not of them, but of a child. The vision never left him. If he awoke in the night, the child smiled; in the morning the child looked upon him with tender eyes. Then he set to work to reproduce that haunting form in marble, and as he wrought he thought:

"I had no children; my little one must bear in his face the promise of eternal youth," or, "I never had happiness; he shall be happy." Yet again: "The beauty that never was mine I will give to him; the wisdom crushed in me shall wake in the child." And through all other thoughts there ran this one: "I was not good; he shall be good."

He could not sleep that night. The house seemed empty, for the child was gone. Early in the morning he stole out to look upon the dear face. A woman and a little child were kneeling upon the doorstep. He was kind to the mother because of the little girl, and touched her gently upon the shoulder.

"Come into the house," he said, "and my housekeeper will give you some breakfast."

She turned and he saw by her dark skin that she was a foreign woman.

"The Bambino!" she said and pointed to the marble child.

Then, as if to repay him for his lost years and the love and joy and wisdom and goodness he had never possessed, the scales fell from his eyes, and he knelt beside the poor strollers and bade the Christmas Babe welcome to his heart.

The flag in the tower was at half-mast that night, but the face of the sculptor was full of peace, and above the door the cherished Bambino held out its sheltering arms to the friendless children, who were, so read his will, to be forever welcome to the home where a little lad long ago had known no happy days.

OUR CHRISTMAS GIFT TO CHRIST: A CHRISTMAS MOTTO.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." The eternal Truth has said so, and all generations and great-minded souls experience often the piercing truth of the saying. And this is particularly a motto for Christmas, when we are all busy giving our little gifts in memory of the Greatest Gift, which the Father gives us in Jesus, which He gives us in Himself, which the Holy Spirit gives us in the Infant of Bethlehem, conceived by His power and born our brother according to the flesh.

Indeed the entire universe seems bent on pouring gifts upon us, if only we have a comprehending and grateful mind to see them, and the tiny gifts we give one another are only a graceful gesture, so to say, by which we who are so encompassed with generous giving wave on some small part of all we have received to someone else, in token of our indebtedness to God and man.

The Christmas Spirit.

Let us enter on the holy time of Christmas, then, with a careful and calculating spirit—but let all our calculations be how much we can give to our neighbor and to God. To our neighbor, besides the more obvious gifts of greetings and presents, of all the lovingness and cheer that we can procure for them by our efforts or spare from our possessions, there are finer and more enduring gifts that a little ingenuity and self-examination will disclose to us. Charity to the poor at Christmas is one of the commonplaces—the blessed commonplaces of the season. But there are deeds of charity at home that we well may look on as part of our Christmas giving.

An Excellent Gift.

What an excellent Christmas gift it would be to select some special defect or deficiency in our character which results in suffering and harm to those about us, and resolve to correct or supply it as a Christmas gift to the home circle and an offering to the Infant Saviour. Then we shall be giving to our family and associates, and to the Lord of Christmas, and to ourselves as well, a gift whereof the savour and the blessing will endure throughout the years.

—Edward F. Garesche, S.J.

When I say that the Son is distinct from the Father, I do not speak of two Gods, but as it were, light from light, and the stream from the fountain, and the ray from the sun.

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