

A FATHER'S CHRISTMAS GIFT.

My commuting companion yesterday morning was a rich man—his name good for more thousands than some of us have tens. So, when he asked if I'd care to see what he was going to give his ten-year-old boy for Christmas, and took out his gold-rimmed card-case, naturally my first guess was a cheque.

"My, but I'd like to be able to start my boy off with a fat savings account," I thought to myself.

So you may imagine my surprise when I read on the slip of paper these words:

"For one year from date, I promise to give my son, —, one hour of my time every day, with two hours on Sunday. And I promise that this time shall be solely his, without interference for business or pleasure of any other sort, and that I shall regard it as a prior engagement each day."

His name was signed at the bottom.

And I wonder what that boy will think and say on Christmas morning when he reads this paper!

If he is an average boy, probably he will not know just what to make of it. As an average boy with an average father, his first thought may be to question the value of such a gift.

For we American fathers—as a rule—give our boys and girls so little of our time, and then mostly fag-ends, that none could blame them for doubting the worth of an agreement of this sort.

Yet, before many days have passed, this particular boy shall have learned that his father could have given nothing quite so fine.

For this man is the most charming of companions. His range of knowledge is wide. He has the faculty of entering into things enthusiastically—that is one reason for his success in business. And he understands human nature.

His Christmas present is so worth while that I want to pass along what he said about it.

"Would you like to know what made me think of it?" he asked.

"Well, the other day a young fellow came to me for a job. I had known his father years ago, and they were a fine family. Now this son is down and out. He looked as if he'd been drinking. And evidently he had no funds,

"When I asked how he had come to such a pass, and with such a father I added, he half broke down.

"My father must have been a fine man," he said, 'but, unfortunately for me, I only knew it through others. He always was too busy to pay much attention to me. As a matter of fact, I never knew him as a companion, a friend, or anything but a man who paid the bills."

"As I sat listening to that poor chap, I suddenly realised that he was painting my picture, too. I've been 'too busy' many a time to take an interest in the things brought to me by my boy. I never have been a companion to him. We're not friends now! Think of that!

"Think of a man neglecting the most important business in which he can engage,—the proper raising of a child or children to help strengthen humanity and carry on the world's work! It all came over me like a flash, and I know I must have reddened with shame. And I gave the fellow a job, and told him he'd given me the best job I'd ever had. He didn't say anything, but I think he understood.

"So, you see, I'm going to put it as a gift, though it's the highest sort of a duty. And really, I ought to make it more than an hour a day, considering the years I've been neglecting this biggest of opportunities!

"Do you know, I feel like hiring a hall and inviting as many fathers as could crowd in and begging them to join hands with me in this sort of thing. Here I've been all these years, rushing and working and worrying at a work any ordinarily intelligent and industrious man could do—and paying the least possible attention to a work no other man in the world can do but myself—being my boy's father!

"Now, I'm going to try to make up to him—and to myself—what we've lost. Already I've arranged matters at the office so as to get away an hour earlier in the afternoon. It may decrease the profits a little, but even if it should cut them in half, I'd rather leave my boy the remembrance of a father who was his comrade than a whole mint of money.

"Anyway, the more you have to do with money, the more you understand how powerless it is to take the place of things that can't be seen or

held or stored away—except in the mind or the heart!"

Neither of us said anything for a minute or so. Then he asked me if I agreed with his idea.

"Do I agree with it! Why, if every father in this land should give his children the same sort of Christmas gift—and live up to it, this would be the best Christmas that ever came along."

And nearly every father could!

Some do already, thank God!—Leigh Mitchell Hodges, in "Philadelphia North American."

IN THE FIELD.

My holiday came to an end on Monday, January 31st, when I left Dunedin by second express in company with over a hundred men off the "Willochra" and their friends, as well as a number of men belonging to the Tenth Expeditionary Force, returning from their final leave. How the khaki swarmed everywhere! Lunch on the train was unattainable, unless one was prepared to fight for it, and the Oamaru refreshment counter was besieged. I stood back until the last khaki man was served, gently elbowing out of the way a civilian or two with the remark, "Fighting men first," which they took in good part. But if I had been a man there would have been one invalided soldier the less sleeping on the seats on the deck of the steamer, which carried 600 passengers that night, including several nurses from Gallipoli. What a merry crew there all were, though!

Wednesday found me at Greytown, as I had promised to attend the first meeting of the year of the baby branch. There was a fine attendance, and arrangements were made for carrying on the Band of Hope. Here I found myself happy in my old quarters at the home of the President.

The following day I reached Masterton, where I was the guest of Mrs Hosking, and in the afternoon a home meeting was held at her house, and one new member received.

Miss Powell's address: Until 26th, care Mrs Neal, Pahiatua; then, Post Office, Marton.