A Yuletide Beatitude

by John De P. Teller
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"His eyes fell upon the kneeling woman." (This is one of the most remarkable photographs ever made of a church service. It is a flashlight taken in Father Parrish's Church of the Advent on Eleventh street while the choristers were leaving in the recessional. Mr. Teller, the author of this Christmas story, is shown at the new organ.)

THE little dog sled toiled slowly over the soft snow and gradually grew near the edge of the dense woods situated close to a little village in Nottingham. Its heavy load of wood buried the runners deep and the lad who trudged alongside would occasionally speak a few words to the faithful animal who had so long been his companion in his journeys through the forest.

Jack Kemble was deep in thought over the many things Miss Brown had told him the night before as they had watched the dying embers on the old hearth in Red Cottage. Times had been hard this winter, and as Jack urged Major forward again after a brief stop his mind pictured the little mistress of Red Cottage waiting for his return and he wondered if she had been able to secure the assistance she had requested from Mr. Ashcroft, her relative in America.

"Come on, 'Maje'; we'll soon be there." As he spoke he put his foot behind the sled and started it.

That night Miss Brown did not eat much supper, as her thoughts were busy over the letter she had received the preceding day from her London solicitor, telling her that he had lost her case in the High Court of Appeal and that the mortgage on her property there would be foreclosed. With her source of income thus cut off, she had written to Ashcroft in New York, and had also confided her financial troubles to Rev. Mr. Wickes, the curate. The responsibility of Jack's education was worrying her.

After supper the two sat for some time quietly talking. She felt a great hesitancy in telling him of the conversation she had with Mr. Wickes. After discussing many phases of his plans for their future, she drew closer to the boy.

"Jack, it is getting near the time when you will have to make your own way in the world, and I think it only right that you should know many things concerning your past history of which I have never spoken before.

"About ten years ago a small sleigh stopped at the door of Red Cottage and a stranger alighted, carrying through the heavy snow a small boy. The stranger said he had heard of me through an old friend in America, William Ashcroft. I told him that he was my cousin, that we knew little of one another, not having seen each other for many years.

"The stranger told me further that he was a seafaring man and was on a business trip to England. As it was so far to the next town and the hour was late, he said he would be greatly obliged if I could give him shelter for the night.

"The request was so unusual that I hesitated for a moment and, quickly perceiving this, he said he would recompense me liberally. I said that I was not thinking of that—only of my poor accommodations.

"He answered with a smile that humble fare was good enough for a sailor.

"The child looked so cold and hungry I had not the heart to send them out in the storm, so I told him if he would be content with what plain hospitality I could offer that he was welcome. He entered and handed me his card:

"It read, 'John Kemble, British ship Strathgyle.'"

"My name," said Jack.

"Yes, lad, you were named after your father."

"You are not my auntie, after all," said Jack, somewhat sorrowfully.

"No, lad, except in spirit."

"You had been with me about a year when he went off on a trip, and when he did not return I made inquiries and the only thing I could learn was that it was thought his ship had foundered at sea with all souls.

"I wrote to Ashcroft to find out, if possible, some clew to his family, and received an answer stating that the captain had told him very little concerning his personal affairs, except to say that he had disagreed with his wife, and had taken his child and embarked on a foreign ship.

"He left a few pieces of jewelry with Ashcroft, one of which he sent me, thinking it might help me in my search. I have always carried it with me, lad, for fear of losing it, but think you are old enough now to appreciate its value."

She took a small plush box from her pocket and opened it. Jack's eyes were wide with curiosity and he leaned over Miss Brown and looked eagerly at the features.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Ashcroft tells me it is your mother's likeness."

"My mother," he exclaimed with awe and rapture.

"Yes, my boy, I have often studied that face and wondered how great would be her joy if she could only see her boy again."

"Is she living?" was Jack's next question.

"From all I can learn, she is, Jack, but as to where your father lived before he came to Nottingham, no one seems to know. Keep the likeness with you always and never let it out of your possession."

There was a pause as Jack reached over to poke the fire.

"Jack, you remember what we were talking about last night. The bad news from London has made it necessary for me to take action immediately. Mr. Wickes was here to-day and we had a long talk on the subject. He has been a good, kind friend, and tells me he has interested Mr. Burton, one of the wardens of the cathedral, in you. Mr. Burton is a wealthy man, and they say he has been very kind to many of the boys of the cathedral school. We have arranged for you to go to the school and have your voice trained in the choir."

"But, auntie—"

"The matter is all arranged and you will leave to-morrow for your new home."

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Over the sunshine of his life in the school a dark cloud gathered. After each service in the cathedral it was Jack's duty to carry the alms basin downstairs to the sacristy. It was autumn and the yellow fields had yielded their good measure of golden store. A harvest festival of praise and thanksgiving had been held in the cathedral and the vicar had made an eloquent appeal for a liberal contribution from his congregation in aid of the poor of the diocese. When the service was over the response was found to have been very generous.

Jack, as had been his custom, carried the alms basin to the sacristy, and then went to the choir room to remove his vestments. The treasurer entered the room a few minutes later and was astonished to find the offertory so small. He hurriedly called the vicar, and the two quickly discovered that the greater part of the money was not there. Although both hated to admit it, suspicion pointed to Jack, he having been the only one who handled the basin. He was sent for in the evening and closely questioned, and although the vicar tried in every way to conceal his suspicions, the boy soon saw through their careful questioning and stoutly asserted his innocence. His pride was terribly wounded at the idea that his superiors could ever suspect him of dishonesty.

It preyed on his mind for two or three days, and at length he determined to leave the school and run away from what he considered gross injustice, although he had not been openly accused. He arose early one morning and leaving the dormitory by the servants' entrance caught the early coach for London.

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England was striving with other nations to crush out the growing power of Napoleon, and as Jack read an old paper he found on the seat he became greatly interested in the accounts of how England's best sons had given their all for their country, and made up his mind to enlist as a drummer boy. As the coach at length drew near London his eyes turned from one interesting object to another. He had but little money in his pocket, and so made up his mind to find the recruiting office at once. He inquired of several persons and was finally able to reach the barracks, where he told a sentry at the outer gate of his desire.

The sentry, after amusing himself at the boy's expense, sent him inside to the sergeant. Jack was enlisted as a drummer in the Seventy-third Light Infantry.

He was not long without excitement, for in the spring his regiment embarked for the Continent. They had hardly rested after their arrival before they were ordered forward.

He and Sergeant Finnigan were seated on a log in front of their small tent vigorously poking a fire which consisted principally of smoke. Finnigan's humor bubbled the merrier as Jack would lose his patience and rub the smoke out of his eyes.

"Shure, darlin', and what are yez a cryin' for whin there is no sphlit milk?" laughed Finnigan as Jack wiped the tears from his eyes.

Jack could not help laughing at the contagious wit of the Irishman.

"Finny," he said, "if you don't stop your joking and help me with this fire I will let you drink your coffee cold."

"Shure an' Oi'll not do thot."

He knelt down before the smoldering logs and by vigorously fanning with his hat succeeded in coaxing a good sized blaze. After supper the two warmed themselves before the fire and Finnigan told several stories.

"Begorra, darlin', but how different yez look from the furst toime Oi seed yez in Lundon. Yer face is so sunburnt yer mother would never know yez."

Jack dropped his eyes. Finnigan quickly perceived the change in the youth's expression and he moved closer to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Me bhoy," he said slowly, after a pause, "did ould Finny say anything to hurt yez feelin'. If Oi did Oi ax yer pardon."

"No, Finny," Jack replied, "it is nothing; only I was—thinking."

He unbuttoned his blouse and took a locket from about his neck. Finnigan drew closer with curiosity and Jack opened the locket.

"Shure, an' where did yez get thot?"

"Finny," said Jack solemnly, "that is my mother."

The old sergeant studied the features. "Shure, an' any blind man could tell yez were her boy, the loikness is so strolking."

Jack told him a little of its history and then carefully returned it to its place.

On the instant they were aroused by the roll of the drums and the stirring calls of the bugles, for the foe was near and the army of the allies was shortly set in motion.

The Seventy-third was assigned a place close to what proved to be the center of attack and throughout the bloody engagement fought with great valor. Jack was slightly wounded on the forehead, and being dazed for a few moments stumbled and fell.

Faithful old Finnigan picked him up and bound up his wound.

Jack felt a trifle weak from the loss of blood, but pluckily refused to be sent to the rear.

Winter was coming on and the first snow had fallen. The soldiers felt the cold severely, but fires were not allowed owing to the proximity of the French army. Quite a number of the young soldiers were taken ill, and when the captain told Jack he would have to be sent to the rear the youth was reluctant to go. Sergeant Finnigan bade him farewell with a tear in his eye and a hearty grip of his rough hand.

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The Nottingham coach had stopped to water the horses at a roadhouse. A window was opened and the head of a woman appeared. Her features and hair bore evidence of premature old age. She inquired of the driver how long it would be before she would reach her destination and seemed very impatient at the delay. In her satchel she carried a letter bearing the address, "Miss Nancy Brown, Red Cottage, Nottingham, England," and in the corner of the envelope was written:

"Introducing Mrs. John Kemble."

After the stage started again she could scarcely control her impatience at its slowness. After years of well nigh fruitless search she had almost despaired of ever seeing her boy again. Through a friend who had heard of her husband's connection with a shipping firm in London she had learned of his death and at once determined to find her son. She had disposed of all her property in Denmark, where she had moved with her husband when they were married.

One morning a messenger knocked at the door of her room and handed her a note. She tore it open and read the following:

"Mrs. John Kemble, Britannia Hotel—Dear Madam: I would be pleased to have you call at my office at your earliest convenience. Our New York representative, Mr. William Ashcroft, called on us yesterday on a business trip, and in the course of conversation I mentioned to him the facts of your search for news of your son. It appears that he was an old friend of your husband, and can give you some information as to your son's whereabouts. I have asked him to call this afternoon, and if you can conveniently be here I am sure the meeting will be a pleasure to us all. With kind regards, very faithfully, HENRY CRANSTON,

"Mgr. Clowes & Hewitt."

Mrs. Kemble told the messenger to tell Mr. Cranston she would see him about 2 o'clock, and upon calling at this time met the gentleman, who presented Mr. Ashcroft to her. They had a long talk in regard to the past, and Mr. Ashcroft told her of his letters from Miss Brown and of her affection for Jack. The interview ended by Ashcroft giving Mrs. Kemble a letter to Miss Brown, and that afternoon she

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