

THE CHRIST CHILD SMILED.

Little Lady Rose skipped up to her nursery after dessert, holding Nanny by the hand. Christmas only a few days off had cast the spell that it weaves for children over her.

"Look, Nanny," she said, disclosing a Treasury note squeezed up in her little hand. "Twenty shillings, Daddy says it is, and I may buy just what I like with it. I should like one of those shiny necklaces like what mummy had on to-night, and a pony, and, oh, lots of things! And mummy said she is sorry she can't come out with me to spend it, she has so many parties, an' she said I was to tell you to take me out to-morrow. No, she said I was to say 'Please, Nanny, will you take me out and let me choose.' I *may* choose, daddy said, an' he said next year, with all these *taxis* praps I wouldn't have any present at all. Do we go in many taxis, Nanny? Mummy always haves the car?"

Lady Rose, in her little white cot, tossed restlessly. What would she buy? Would the morning never come? Nanny more than once came in from the adjoining nursery in response to an excited cry about dollies, and perambulators, and shiny beads like mummy's.

But morning came at last, and though Nanny was very tiresome about insisting on washing, and hair doing, as usual, and the bread-and-milk—so prosaic—had to be eaten, at last they were in the Palace Stores. Nanny wisely ignored the jewellery department as mummy's shiny beads had cost a little fortune. She also ruled out the pony, and Lady Rose, bowing to an autocratic rule, accompanied her, just a little dashed, into the toy bazaar. But once there, all grievances vanished into thin air.

Perhaps Nanny enjoyed the display as much as little Rose, for she allowed her to inspect to the full the bewildering display of fascinating toys. But the child learnt that there is a limit even to what little girls with a title and twenty shillings to spend can buy, and after many disappointments the die was cast and a doll was selected. With the facile temperament of childhood, once the selection was made the toy store was blotted out for Lady Rose. She would hardly allow the long-suffering assistant to take it from her arms to pack it, but Nanny explained that as she could not take full possession until Christmas Day, she must submit to this dull arrangement.

"But let Nanny carry it?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Nanny!"

"Well, don't drop it, or mummy will be vexed."

It was cold when they came outside the stores and little flakes of snow were falling. Lady Rose, in her ermine coat and cap and white leggings thought it great fun and laughed as the flakes smote her bright cheeks and melted on her sleeve.

The store was brilliantly lighted for the sky was overcast, and the child once more became fascinated with the window display.

"And oh, Nanny, look! There is a darling dolly just like mine. I s'pose they didn't wrap up

the wrong one, did they?" she asked anxiously. They were under the shelter of the awning, so Nanny continued to be obliging, and was in good truth well amused herself. Close to Lady Rose stood a little hatless girl about her own age; yes, and coatless, too. She had wandered, as such children do, from a poor neighbourhood to feast her eyes on unattainable delights. Utterly without envy, she was tracing with a little grubby finger along the shop pane. "Oo—er," she was saying to herself. ("What does 'oo—er' mean?" thought Lady Rose.) Nanny would certainly have told her to use her handkerchief. By this time Nanny was further engrossed with a friend in the same profession out on much the same errand. Lady Rose edged a little nearer the ragged child, who, in her turn, put her finger in her mouth and regarded this dainty apparition with an unabashed and curious air. Lady Rose forgot her manners and stared back. "Little girl," she said, "haven't you got a hanky?"

"No," said the child.

"You may have mine," she said, holding out a coloured morsel.

"Wot for?" asked the child.

"'Cos you've got a cold, I think," said Lady Rose, politely.

The child stared, but settled the question with the sleeve of her frock.

"Aren't you cold, little girl? Why didn't your mummy put on your coat?"

"Ain't got no coat, and ain't got no mummy, and daddy ain't got no work."

"Have you got a dolly?" ventured Lady Rose.

The child disclosed a small bundle of rag tied at one end with a piece of string.

"Yus, I got a dolly!" she brightened.

"What's it like?" said Rose.

"This here's my dolly!"

Rose considered, "Well, I shouldn't call *that* a dolly," she said.

Nanny's conversation having come to an end, she suddenly became aware of the fast falling snow.

"We must take a taxi home," she said; and hailing a passing vehicle she hurried her little charge into it.

Rose protested. "If we have taxis daddy won't give me a present next year," she finished with a sob.

"He didn't mean these kind of taxis, child. Why, whatever have you done with your parcel?"

Something that wasn't a snowflake glistened on the pretty lashes and fell down on the coat.

"I gave it the little girl," she sobbed. "And, oh, Nannie, I hope we shan't take many taxis before next Christmas."

"Well, I don't know *whatever* your mummy will say when she hears about it, Lady Rose."

But I think the Christ Child smiled in His crib. Don't you? H. H.

"Children are the perpetual Messiah, sent into the arms of fallen men to win them back to Paradise."—Emerson.

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