The One Disinterested Gift

An Easter Story

By Amelia Wright

One spring day, the Saturday before Easter Sunday, a boy of fifteen trudging along a road with a little bundle containing his clothing stopped under a tree to eat a bite of luncheon he carried in his pocket. While he was there a girl a year or two younger than he came along and said to him:

"You look very tired. Have you come far?"

"I have walked all the way from L. since 4 o'clock this morning. I am going to the city and must reach it before night."

"What are you going there for?"

"To begin to make myself independent. I am a half orphan with a stepmother. She has made it so disagreeable for me at home that I can stay there no longer."

"Have you any friends in the city to help you?"

"No."

"Any money to use till you get a start?"

"No."

"What will you do for food and for a place to sleep?"

"As for food, I will go hungry; as for a place to sleep, I hear there are benches in the parks."

A great pity welled up into the girl's eyes. Presently she unclasped her palm and uncovered a crisp five dollar bill. She looked at it longingly, then extended it to the boy. "Take this," she said. "My uncle gave it to me for a birthday present. I am thirteen years old today."

"What were you going to do with it?"

"I was going to buy a sweater. All the girls have sweaters, and I have long wanted one. But you will need it far more than I. It may keep you till you get a position."

The offer of this money was the only sacrifice the boy had ever experienced. Thus far whatever had been given him had come from those whose duty it was to protect him, but everything he had received had come grudgingly.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Laura."

"Laura what?"

"Laura Maryweather."

"And you think me so despicable as to take from you your birthday gift? Nothing would induce me to do so. I am going to the city to make my fortune. I have learned the value of money by hard knocks, and I shall take more such lessons. I shall make people pay me for what they get out of me, and I shall work, work, work, and save, save, save, until I am rich. But I will do it all myself. I will be beholden to no one."

"What are you going to do with your money when you get it?"

"Do with it? Well, one thing I will do with it—I will hold it up to glitter before the eyes of those who have denied me those things a boy desires, and I will make them feel how easy it would be to make them happy, but I won't."

The girl looked at him through a pair of eyes that grew big with wonder, mingled with which was an expression of reproach. Finally she said:

"Aren't *you* a queer boy?"

"Do you think that too?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I am queer since you say so. Others have told me that, but I would not believe them. Well, I must get on. Goodby."

"Aren't you going to thank me for offering you my birthday gift?"

"No. Thanks are empty words."

"Well, you have taught me a lesson in courage and independence, for which I thank you very much."

The boy turned away from her without another word. She watched him till he passed out of sight, then said to herself:

"That's the queerest boy I ever saw in my life."

After that she went on to the village and bought a sweater.

And what did the boy say of the girl as he drew away from her? "That girl is the biggest fool I ever met."

Twenty years passed. Laura Maryweather in a worldly point of view fulfilled the boy's opinion of her. She gave first to others, second to herself. As to economy, she never knew what it meant. The day came when she passed beyond her father's and mother's care and was obliged to take care of herself, being compelled to work very hard. She was always giving away things she needed herself, taking no forethought for her future and spending what money she devoted to her own use without much wisdom. She was the personification of improvidence.

When she was twenty-five she married a man named Spellmeyer, who had no better head for getting on in the world than herself. Several children were born to her, then her husband died and left her with just what she had when he married her—nothing. Another five years passed, during which her children were growing older and needing more and more every year. Then she broke down in both health and spirit.

One morning the postman left a letter for her containing a check for $25 signed with a name she had never heard before, Simeon Wrinkle. The letter said that on Saturday before Easter there was to be an auction sale of household furniture in the city. "Attend the sale and bid on a cake of maple sugar." The check bore date of several months before, and the envelope looked a little faded. The recipient was puzzled beyond measure. There was nothing to eat in the house and she was furnished with $25 with which to buy a cake of maple sugar probably not worth a dollar. She spent the money for necessities.

One trait common with us all, curiosity, led her to attend the sale. She tried to borrow a dollar to take with her to buy the maple sugar, but though she applied to those indebted to her, no one could spare the amount at the time, so she went with but a few cents in her pocket.

She found that a man supposed to be wealthy had died and left no will, so far as had thus far been discovered. He had left instructions that his household effects be sold at auction and all his relatives be hidden to the sale. An army of these persons were there, believing that a legacy would be contained in some of the articles sold. As soon as the auctioneer mounted the stand a spirited bidding commenced on everything that was hollow. Crockery, knives and forks that could not be used to conceal a treasure went for nothing. Mrs. Spellmeyer regretted that she had spent her $25, for she could have bought lots of things she wanted for a song. But sofas, bureaus and desks with locked drawers brought fabulous prices. As soon as an article was knocked down to a bidder it was torn to pieces in the hope of finding a sum of money, stocks, bonds or jewelry.

Finally some kitchen stores were put up and among other things a cake of maple sugar. Mrs. Spellmeyer by this time began to suspect that the deceased had intended to favor her, but she could scrape together only 7 cents of the money provided to secure the sugar. She made the first bid on it she made on anything, and, this attracting attention, the cake was soon up to $10, so she lost it.

Meanwhile there was a smashing and a tearing to pieces of all sorts of articles as fast as they were bought.

The sale was over without any large sum being discovered, though those who had made purchases were still pulling to pieces what they had bought. One old lady who had bought a bed had ripped the ticking off the mattress and was throwing the contents aside as a ship throws the waves from her bow. A man who had purchased an iron box (locked and no key) was drilling a hole in it with a view to inserting an explosive and blowing it open. A boy was chopping to piece a bureau the drawers of which could not be removed in any other way. A young girl added to the din by trying to blow bank bills out of a cornet's piston. At the moment some one stove in the head of a drum.

The auctioneer, standing on the platform with a bit of paper in his hand, rapped with his gavel. When he had secured attention he began to speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the intention of the deceased in ordering this sale has been discovered. One of the articles sold, a cake of maple sugar, was broken apart and this paper found within: 'I give and bequeath all my property, real and personal, to Laura Spellmeyer, nee Maryweather.'"

There was a hush for a moment, followed by a howl of disappointed rage. The auctioneer rapped and cried above the din, "Is Laura Spellmeyer present?"

The widow, not knowing whether she was on her heels or her head, stood up and said she was the party called for. A sleek looking gentleman advanced toward her and stated that he had been the deceased's attorney and had the care of the property. He had forwarded to her the mysterious letter she had received. It had been left with him by the testator some time before his death.

A crowd gathered round the widow, composed mostly of those who had expected little or nothing, to congratulate her. To their questions as to her connection to the deceased she replied that she had never heard of him, whereupon the attorney said that the testator had told him the reason for willing his property as he did.

In all his life he had received but one offer of purely disinterested kindness. When journeying to the city a penniless boy he had met a girl who offered him a five dollar bill she had just received for a birthday gift. That girl he made his heir.

Mrs. Spellmeyer tried to remember the incident, but failed. It had occurred many years before, when she was a child, and it had passed out of her memory.

She was receiving congratulations, her face wreathed in smiles, when the lawyer asked her if she knew how much money she had inherited.

"La' sakes," she exclaimed, "I never thought of that!"

"Guess."

"A thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars! It's more than a million."

"Oh, my goodness gracious! I wonder how I came to deserve such treatment of my heavenly father."

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these ye did it unto the king."

In the collection plate in Mrs. Maryweather's congregation the next day was an Easter offering of $100,000 for a new church and another $100,000 for an endowment. This was only the beginning of the widow's gifts. She seemed to take as much pleasure in scattering her money as the man from whom she inherited it had taken in hoarding it. The only smart thing she ever said was in this connection:

"The Lord needs two people to dispense benefactions—one to get money together, another to scatter it."

SPITTING VENOM.

Snakes That Can Eject a Stream of Poison From Their Fangs.

A writer in the National Geographic Magazine says that some of the African, not the East Indian, cobras spit poison at any one who disturbs them.

The ringhals, genus sepedon, of southern Africa is a pitch black, exceedingly vicious cobra that receives its name from one or two broad white bands that show on the neck when the snake is reared in fighting pose. When he arches his neck to glare at the intruder he is able to eject fine jets of poison to a distance of six or eight feet. These deadly streams are dangerously well aimed.

The poison is ejected by contracting the lower jaw in such a fashion that the permanently erect fangs overlap it. At a movement of the adversary the reptile arches his neck till the head is thrown backward, bringing the tips of the hypodermic teeth to bear. The muscles over the poison glands are contracted, and a thin stream of venom leaves each fang. The observer is liable to receive the poison directly in the eyes, and the amount thus ejected is surprising.

The writer has seen the entire lower part of a large glass panel peppered with tiny drops, and in photographing or observing the snakes always protects his eyes with auto goggles. The front of his camera is often well spattered with tiny drops of poison, as the cobra becomes infuriated at the movements of the photographer's hands in focusing.

In one of his books Theodore Roosevelt tells how the explorer Tariton was once struck in the eyes and nearly blinded by poison thus spit forth. Washing the eyes with milk was found to give the most speedy relief.

ANALYSIS OF A LAUGH.

Physical Exposition of an Act Some Persons Cannot Enjoy.

What is laughter? An American humorist has called it "an undignified widening of the human mouth, accompanied by a noise resembling a cough in the effort to avoid swallowing a chestnut."

"Laughter," said Professor Sir Charles Bell, "is a convulsive action of the diaphragm. In this state the person draws a full breath and throws it out in interrupted, short and audible cachinnations. This convulsion of the diaphragm is the principal part of the physical manifestation of laughter.

"But there are several accessories, especially the sharp vocal utterance arising from the violent tension of the larynx and the expression of the features, this being a more intense form of the smile. In extreme cases the eyes are moistened by the effusion from the lachrymal glands."

There are some people who cannot laugh, who are wholly unable to enjoy either the physical or the mental luxury of a laugh. Thus it was said of William III. that he was utterly at a loss to understand what could be got out of laughter except loss of dignity. There are many persons in history who have been, according to common report, incapable of laughter. Queen Mary I., John Knox, Robespierre and Moltke are examples. The Iron Duke himself rarely, if ever, went beyond a grunt.—London Strand Magazine.

Added Injury.

A woman who "had an account to settle" with the village schoolmaster in consequence of his chastising her boy visited the schoolroom and used some very strong language. The schoolmaster, finding it impossible to pacify her, put her outside and locked the door against her. For a long while the sounds of angry expostulations and of knocks and hammering upon the door were heard, but the much tried man took no notice. Ultimately he went to unlock the door and found the woman sitting on the ground, waiting for him with an expression on her face that was more eloquent than words. He had shut her skirt in the door when he locked it and kept her a prisoner all the morning.—London Globe.

Mother.

Children, look in those eyes, listen to that dear voice, notice the feeling of even a single touch that is bestowed upon you by that gentle hand. Make much of it while yet you have that most precious of all good gifts, a loving mother. Read the unfathomable love of those eyes, the kind anxiety of that tone and look, however slight your pain. In after life you may have friends—fond, dear friends—but never will you have again the inexpressible love and gentleness lavished upon you which none but a mother bestows.—Macaulay.

A Good Sort of Man.

"Pray," said a lady to Foote, "what sort of man is Sir John D.?"

"Oh, a very good sort of man!"

"But what do you call a very good sort of man?"

"Why, madam, one who preserves all the exterior decencies of ignorance!"

Grumblers.

Some people who are always grumbling because they cannot get what they consider their share of the sweets of life forget that they have omitted to put their penny in the slot.

Suspicion Aroused.

Brown—Yes, my dear, I shall be glad to go with you. I long to see the beauties of the country. Mrs. Brown—We will remain in town.

Interwoven is the love of liberty with every ligament of the heart.—Washington.

BRANDED BRIDES.

Novel Betrothal Customs of the Natives of New Guinea.

So far as proposals of marriage are concerned, in New Guinea it is always leap year, for in that island the men consider it beneath their dignity to notice women, much less to make overtures of marriage. Consequently the proposing is left to the women to do.

When the ebony belle falls in love with a man she sends a piece of string to his sister or, if he has no sister, to his mother or another of his lady relatives. Then the lady who receives the string tells the dusky masher that the particular damsel is in love with him. No courting follows, however, for it is considered beneath a New Guinea gentleman's dignity to waste time in such a pursuit. If the man thinks he would like to wed the lady he meets her alone, and they decide straight away whether to marry or drop the idea.

In the former case the betrothal is announced. The man is then marked on the back with charcoal, while a mark is actually cut into the woman's skin.

No breach of promise actions are possible in New Guinea, though if the lady is jilted her friends may hunt her lover up and "go" for him. On the other hand, if the dark damsel prove faithless she is liable to be beaten by her betrothed if he catches her.—Pearson's Weekly.

Water as Food.

In the light of certain statistics given by W. J. McGee in the World's Work the old sentence of "bread and water" does not, at all events, sound like starvation rations. For man and other animals water is the leading food. The average human ration is some six pounds daily, four and one-half liquid and one and one-half nominally solid. A pound of grain is the equivalent of two tons of water used by the growing wheat and a pound of beef the equivalent of fifteen to thirty tons of water consumed by the beeves chiefly in the form of feed, and the adult who eats 200 pounds each of bread and beef in a year consumes something like a ton of water in drink and the equivalent of 400 tons in bread and 4,000 tons in meat, or 4,401 tons in all.

Domestic Troubles.

Husband—What's the matter, dear? Why do you look so worried?

Wife—Oh, I've just got everything all ready for Mrs. Meatleigh's visit. I've done up all the curtains and pillowshams and bureau covers and centerpieces, and they're all spick and span.

Husband—Well, if everything is in such apple pie order why look so disconsolate about it?

Wife (bursting into tears)—Oh, I just know as soon as she sees them she'll know I cleaned everything all up because she was coming.—Judge.

Reason For Her Talk.

Lola, aged four, was present at dinner one evening when a number of guests were being entertained by her parents, and during a lull in the conversation she began to talk very earnestly.

"Why do you talk so much, Lola?" asked her father.

"'Cause I've got somethin' to say," was the innocent reply.—Chicago News.

INDICTED BY GRAND JURY.

SAN DIEGO, Cal.—The county grand jury has returned 32 indictments charging conspiracy against 32 members of the I. W. W., who have been violating the street speaking ordinance here, and who are now in the county jail.

FIASCO R. R. STRIKE

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in Southeast Portland boarding of the employes within the enclosures of the shops was discontinued several days ago, so it was stated yesterday.