

Did you know that 20% of Americans finish their Christmas shopping on Christmas eve. 28% of Americans re-gift their Christmas presents.

## His Story

It was getting quite dark in the short winter's day when Mrs. Jones and Uncle Bob had made an end of their preparation of the old store-room. Then the little maid, long expectant, heard with pleasure the thud of the crutches which announced his approach. Now she would have him all to herself, and -he would tell her what he meant the tree for. She had made the hearth clean as best she could, and the fire was burning brightly; for the night was frosty, and in the fire and candle-light the room seemed cozy indeed, and a smile of pleasure stole over Uncle Bob's face as he sat down to enjoy it.

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Pushing the table back and bringing the fir-bush forward, he said, 'Come, little woman, now for the secret'; and reaching up for the parcels, he displayed their contents upon the table before her admiring eyes. There was a great variety of all kinds of toys, some colored, some glittering, some useful, some ornamental.

'This is fruit,' he said, 'to be hung on the tree in inviting clusters. Isn't it nice work for Christmas?' he asked.

"Oh yes," she cried; "but what is it for?" "Supposing," he answered, with provoking slowness, "supposing it is for a dear little girl to have for her own, from which she can hand to twenty boys just before they go home, at the very moment when they think all is over, a nice bunch of this fruit for their sister or brother; what would you say to that? Eh, little one?"



The first church the Dutch built in New York City was named in St Nicholas' honor -St Nicholas Church.

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'It will be splendid!' she exclaimed, and clasped her hands in great delight, for she didn't doubt for one moment but that she was the little girl he meant.

However, she fell into a fit of musing, from which she awoke as he watched her face, to shyly ask the question which had been slowly forming in her mind 'Uncle,' she said, 'are you so good because God is the Good Father?'

'Dear child,' he said, with a smile, 'to think me good! But let us put it in a better way. Do I like to make the boys happy this Christmas, because I know God is the Good Father? To that I say "Yes." Didn't He give us His Great Gift at Christmas to make us all happy? '

'Yes,' she replied; 'I know He gave us Jesus, who loved us so much.'

'Well, child, the more I think of that, the more my heart warms to others. Is it not so always? These lads, how happy they will be! And I love to think Jesus will be very pleased.'

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'But, Uncle Bob, did you always like to do such things? Tell me how it was that you came to feel so. I should so like to know, because I want to be like you, and to feel as you feel. It seems so strange to me that you can love God.'

There was a deeper perplexity in her mind than she could express. It was the old, ever-recurring difficulty which asks, 'How can God be good, and yet allow His creatures to suffer?' To her loving heart it came in the personal, yet unselfish form of 'How could God be the Good Father, as Uncle Bob always called Him, and yet have let Uncle Bob be such a poor cripple?' She didn't think of her own case. Uncle Bob's love for her and his constant care over her seemed to make that all right. Unconsciously, no doubt, but yet very really, she felt that her weakness drew out Uncle Bob's love, and that that, somehow, was better than to be strong and have no Uncle Bob's love. But she wasn't old enough to apply her own case to Uncle Bob and God's love for him.

All this Uncle Bob saw to be at the bottom of her heart, for love is full of insight. He remained silent for a moment, casting about in his mind

what it would be best to tell her, so as to get her over her difficulty.

'You are wondering, little one,' he said at length, 'how I came to be a cripple, and how I came to love God. Well, I will try to tell you. It's a sad story in one way, but a blessed one in another.

'It wasn't God made me a cripple: it was some one else. I was born all right, and straight, and strong. Perhaps I should have been a tall man if I'd been left as God made me; but it wasn't to be.'

'Oh, Uncle Bob, how was it? Who did it?' And little Lizzie put her thin hand upon his and stroked it.

'I had rather not tell you, child, if I could help it; but I cannot bear you should think wrong things about the Good Father. It was my poor earthly father did it, one night when he was not sober. It was the drink in him did it. Drink was the devil in him, and made him bad and cruel; and one night he pulled me out of my mother's arms when I was crying for fear of him, and threw me on the floor, and my back hit hard against the fender, I think, and my spine was injured, and I became the cripple I am. But, you see, it wasn't God who did it. No; He watched over me, and now I can see that He has been working ever since to turn the evil into good. He has made it a blessing to me.'

'Dear Uncle Bob,' said the little maid, 'tell me how He did it.'

, I will try; but it isn't always easy to make another see what we can see ourselves. But whether I can make it plain or not, I know it IS so. I think it came about in this way. Being made into such a helpless little fellow (I was about four years old when it happened), I found out how sweet and precious love is, and that somehow made me ready for the love of God. My mother was such a dear, good mother! I must have been a great trouble, being so helpless and always crying, I dare say, because so suffering; but she seemed only to love me more. How much she must have gone through to rear me! For my father wouldn't give up the drink, and therefore he could scarcely bear the sight of me: my pale face and broken body showed him his sin in a dreadful light.'

'I see now,' murmured the little maid, 'why you always call God your "good" Father!'

'Ah! Little one,' he said, 'let us be thankful with all our hearts to being his children. He won't let us be unloving and unkind. I thank Him that He made even poor father ashamed of his sin, and deeply repentant. But it took many years and many hardships.

'Father kept on being unkind to mother; and she did all that in her lay to turn his attention from me, and to make things go comfortably; but I couldn't help being afraid of him, and she used to take me to my cot upstairs when it was his time to come home from his work. Poor mother! I shall never forget the tears that have fallen from her on to my face as she has placed me there. The world little knows what many hearts suffer; but be comforted, dear one-the Good Father knows. Mother found out that at last, and she told me all about it, though I was too young to understand much; and she and I used to pray to God to help us, and to help father. Such different help God has to find for us. Poor mother wanted one sort of help, and poor father quite another.

'I think it was her prayers which made me begin to long that father would love me. It seemed to me that if he could love me he would get free of the drink, and make mother happy. But it wasn't to be; though, when she lay sick and dying, he was deeply miserable, and sat for hours at home moody and sad, and every now and then a great sigh would break from him. God was working at his conscience in answer to our prayers, and trying to open his heart to repentance; but it was not until he lay on his own death-bed that he was really a changed man. At least, I think he did really change then, for he wept bitterly, and called out my mother's name in such pitiful tones!

'Yes, dear mother died. She was worn out and heart-broken; and I was left in my weakness all alone with my father when I was about twelve years old. I had no brothers or sisters. All that I possessed was the memory of my mother's love, and the hope of seeing her again in heaven. And this I see now to have been very precious. Perhaps if I had been all right and strong I should have gone out with other boys and in their games and sports have forgotten her love, or lost its feeling of heavenly influence. But being a cripple, all I could do was to sit and think.

I can remember being very sad. Often have I wondered, like you, whether God was good; but the thought of my mother always came to my aid, and I knew that what she trusted was true. All the same, it did not comfort me, and I was a lonely, sad-hearted boy who looked out from the doorway in summer on the boys as they played about in the street, or in winter from the window on the passers-by, and only wished I were with my mother.

'No one seemed to care for me. At first, after my mother's death, a few neighbor women would come in and do things for me; but they dropped off one by one, having, no doubt, much to do at home. Sometimes a boy or girl would come and stare wonderingly at me, as if I were not human like them, but something quite different, and this made me vexed and bitter and shy. Sometimes even they made faces at me as they went away. Worst of all, my father's old feeling seemed to grow on him again. He would place a loaf and knife on the table with some milk when he went out to his work in the morning, and a neighbor would get me a little tea in the evening, and then I crept to my cot as best I could, to be out of his sight when he returned.'

'Poor uncle!' almost sobbed little Lizzie. 'But the Good Father,' Uncle Bob went on, 'was watching over me and arranging for me. Two things happened by-and-by which changed my life. The first seems a very simple thing; but I see it did wonders for me. One of the neighbors, who had to go out to earn her own living, had a little baby, and not knowing what better to do with it, she brought it to me in its cradle, and made me its nurse. At first I felt rather sad, because it somehow reminded me of dear mother; but at last the sadness formed itself into a thought of pity. "Poor little thing! If I said, as I ventured to stroke its soft cheeks and tiny hands; "you are helpless, like I am. I must be a good nurse." Something opened in my heart, and I learnt to love that baby more than I can tell; and as I loved it life grew so different, so much happier. It taught me a lesson I have never forgotten. It taught me that if we can love we can be happy, in spite of everything. It is not anything fine about us which makes us happy, it is love within us, filling our hearts. That baby, I am sure, was sent by the Good Father to poor me to teach me that.'

'Oh, Uncle Bob, was I that baby?' Lizzie asked, with eager voice.

'No, Miss Conceit, it wasn't you. If you had been that baby, you would have been quite a woman by this time; and yet it is true that you grew out of that baby. Perhaps if I hadn't loved that baby, I should never have loved you. It may be the Good Father was getting my heart ready for my little girl. Let us think so, dear one, and praise Him for it this Christmas Eve.'

'I will, dear uncle, I will; I begin to see a little more clearly. But what was the second thing which happened?'

'It was this. One fine afternoon some time after-on a day when baby was gone home early-I was sitting in the doorway, looking, I have no doubt, a poor object, when a beautiful young lady passed by. She stopped to speak to me, and soon learnt all about me. She had such sweet smiles I couldn't help telling her all. I saw tears in her eyes as I told her about mother and how much I missed her; and then she asked if I would like her to come and see me once a week and teach me to read. I said, "Oh yes; because your eyes are so like mother's," whereupon she stroked my head and went away.

'She was so good to me for many weeks, and not only did she teach me how to read a little, but she talked to me a good deal. One day she said, "Have you heard, Bob, about the dear Savior Jesus?" and when I told her I didn't know anything to speak of, she was so sorry. "Why, Bob," she said, "Jesus is the very best Friend we've got. I know He sent me to you, and told me to help you. Listen and I'll tell you about Him." And then she read such nice stories in the Gospels, and explained them, so that it seemed as if I could see Jesus healing the sick and looking kindly on me. I know my heart ached to think He wasn't with us now.

"But," said the lady, "He loves us just as much now as when He died for us on the cross; yes, and is just as much with us."

"What!" I said, "is Jesus with us now?"

Does He see me and know that I am a cripple?"

"He does indeed, Bob; because He is God as well as man; and if you just talk to Him, He hears."

'It was very difficult to understand, but somehow I couldn't help believing her, she was' so good, and I loved her so. Love is the best teacher, and that is why the Good Father sent His own Son to teach us, I think.'

Little Lizzie looked up into his face with a quick, sympathetic glance, as much as to say, 'Oh yes, I understand that!'

'But I must get on faster with my story, or the tree will be in full bloom long before I've done. You must know, the young lady was a visitor at the vicarage, and one day, before she left, she said to me, "Bob, if I can get you into a place in London where they might do your back good, would you be willing to come?" I said, "Yes," of course; it was so nice to be cared for and to have a little hope given to one's heart; and the upshot of it was that after she had gone a letter came to the vicarage which said that all was arranged, and I was to come up. Then the people at the parsonage took me in hand. I was such a lot of trouble, but they never seemed to mind either trouble or expense. They got me nice clothes and took me to the station in their

carriage, and sent a servant with me who made me lie down in the railway carriage on soft rugs, and gave me nice things to eat, and spoke kindly to me, and so did several people who got into the carriage, and were told all about me. One woman made me cry. She kissed me very tenderly, and wished me God's blessing. It brought back my mother so clearly. I shall never forget that journey; it made the world seem so full of kind, good people.

'That was how I got to London, little one. Doesn't it seem as if the Good Father had arranged it all specially for me, through these kind people? That is what my beautiful young lady said, and what I came to think, and now nothing could make me doubt that the good Spirit of God is working here below. He works in all hearts which will let Him. Do you see, dearie?

'The young lady met me and took me to the hospital, and there I had such kindness shown me as I cannot describe. If I had been a little prince instead of a little cripple, I could not have been better treated. The old doctors came every day to look at me, and the young doctors did something almost every day to help me, and they would make fun, to make me laugh and be cheerful. And the nurse, oh, she was so nice both day and night! It was so comfortable to be tucked up in bed as she tucked me up; and she just knew where to put my poor crooked back so as to make it easy. God bless that hospital! It was a little bit of heaven. I go to see it occasionally, and some day I will take you to see it.

, But it was the young lady I used to look for most. She came regularly once a week to see me. Things seemed all right always after she had been to see me. 'She would comfort me so sweetly if I was sad, and she told me such nice things about the world outside that I began to feel quite an interest in life. She brought me books, too-picture books mostly. One was a book about animals in the Zoological Gardens, and one was a book about Jesus, and how He went about doing good. How naturally she talked about Jesus! She used to say, "Just open your eyes inside your heart, and see Him close by you, smiling on you, ready to put your head on His bosom, or to take your hand in His."

'I think it was after I took this home, and believed it, that I began to really pray. I began to talk to Jesus, and simply tell Him everything in my heart, all I needed and felt, and especially I asked Him to help me to be brave and good when the kind doctors came, because, you know, they had often to hurt me in order to make me better. That is a thing we have to learn in this world; we have to be hurt sometimes in order to grow good. Growing good is like being made well, and as the doctor has to hurt us in some sore place to get us better, so the Good Father has often to do the same; but all in love, all in love.

'As time went on I grew a little stronger, and began to be able to use my hands. One day the lady said, "See, Bob, I've brought you a knife! Would you like it?" "Oh yes," I said, quite eager; for it was such a fine one, and all boys like a knife. She opened one bright blade, and said smilingly, "But you will cut yourself." I vowed and protested I wouldn't, and that I would be so careful. Then she showed me another blade, and a rasp, and a blade which was hollowed, and had a sort of spoon at the end, and at last she said, "I thought, Bob, it would do to carve with. Would you like to learn whilst you lie here in bed? Do you think, if you had some soft wood, you could manage to carve a toy like this?" showing me a little wooden plate.

'I felt quite frightened at the idea. At the same time I was excited by the thought of using that splendid knife, and when Miss Constance took out of her bag (for she had come fully prepared) a square piece of wood marked out in the centre with blue lines into the shape of a plate, my fingers began to fidget to be at work, and I paid very close attention to the directions she gave me.

'That was another great turning-point in my life. It gave me something to do, and took my thoughts off myself. The less we think about self the better, I find. But what was still better, I began to feel that I could do something - I, the poor cripple, could really do something. For one day Miss Constance praised a little house I had done, and then I felt that feeling which made a little man of me, and courage and hope came into my heart. God was ordering all things kindly for me. For all my new courage and hope were more than needed to bear a blow which had to come. It was such a blow at the time, but now I feel ashamed that I thought so much about myself, instead of thinking only about Miss Constance.

"Bob," she said one day, soon after I was fairly launched into carving, "Bob, our Good Father has been arranging things for me as well as you, and He has given me great happiness. I want you also to be very good to me."

I smiled at this, for what would I not do, I thought, to be good to her; only what could I do? Carve her some toy? I could perhaps do that, but that wouldn't be anything she could care for; and so I was perplexed. What did she mean? For I saw she meant something serious.

"I am going to be married, dear Bob," she went on; "and my husband has to go out to Africa as a missionary, and therefore you know I must, of course, go with him. It is the Good Father who is sending us, and so you, dear Bob, must be good to me also, and let me go."

You see, she knew how hard I should feel it, and this was her nice way of putting it.

'I think I shall never forgive myself for the way I took it. Instead of trying to smile a life - time of thanks for all she had done for me, I only thought for myself, and burst into tears, because it seemed that I was going to lose the light out of my life. She had come to me in the depth of my misery and helped me, and now she was going to leave me, and all would be dark again. So selfish was I.'

'But, dear Uncle Bob, it was hard to have to lose your beautiful lady.'

The little voice which thus tried to comfort spoke as if very conscious that the owner would feel just as Uncle Bob did if Uncle Bob were to have to leave her. So much alike is one heart to another in life's experience.

Ah! But little one, wouldn't it have been a whole world better to have been able to smile, and thank her, and tell her I would let her go, with all my love? Wasn't she feeling for me all the while, and ought I not to have felt for her? Wasn't she asking me to be noble and unselfish for both our sakes, and oughtn't I to have swallowed down all my sorrow, and just been what she wanted? Wasn't she just acting Christ-like, and oughtn't I to have said, "Dear Lord Jesus, make me also like Thee; she is beautiful with Thy love-let me be beautiful too"? Besides, did I not forget to look to the Lord Jesus? I ought to have turned to Him at once; if I had, He would have made me feel right. As it "vas, I only burst into a passion of tears, though I did try to keep

them down. What brought me to after a while was that I happened to catch sight of tears silently rolling down the cheeks of Miss Constance, whilst she was trying to soothe me, and wipe away mine.

This really horrified me. It seemed so bad of me to let her cry for me. What was I thinking of to be causing her such pain and grief-me, only a little cripple, and she so beautiful and good? At sight of those tears I did try to be all right, and to smile into her face, and then she called me her little "brave man"; but all the while she smiled and talked the tears filled her eyes, and every now and then one would overflow and roll quietly down her cheek. She said she could be quite happy, now that I could let her go, and she began to tell me of all she and her husband hoped to do as the missionaries of Jesus amongst the dark, ignorant Negroes. She was going to get little black children into a school, and teach them, and he was going to get the men and women, and tell them of the love of God, of which they had never yet heard.

"And you see, Bob," she said, "you will be helping too if you just give me to these poor heathen with all your heart." So she put it, the sweet angel. I see now that she just wanted to bless me with her own sacrifice, and let me have a share in it, and in the love of Jesus.'

'Oh, Uncle Bob, she was good. Do you think she will ever come back and see us?'

It was some time before Uncle Bob could speak to answer this question. Something seemed to stick in his throat which had to be cleared away before he could answer.

'She will never come back, little one,' he said at length; 'but I hope we shall both see her one day. She has gone to heaven, to be with Jesus. The climate of Africa, they say, killed her. It is so hot, and damp, and full of fever, and she was so weak that she couldn't stand it, and so my dear Miss Constance is now in heaven, and we must both follow her there, little one, must we not? Jesus will let us do so, if we ask Him.'

'Uncle Bob,' said the child, 'is it because of Miss Constance that you put money into that box on the mantel-piece every Sunday, and that you like to go to missionary meetings?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I think it is little one. She had a great deal to do with it. I owe that blessing also to her. Because she went to the Africans, and because I loved her so, and because she died for them, it came into my heart to think of them; and then, you see, I couldn't help going on to think that some one better and greater than even Miss Constance died for them first. It was because Jesus died for us all that Miss Constance herself was willing to die for the Africans; and when I saw that clearly, I saw that God had been leading me, through her love and example, to think of those whom Jesus came to seek and to save.

'But I haven't yet told you all she did for me. It was she who gave me my start in business. Actually even in the midst of all her preparations to be married and to go such a long journey, she still thought of me and my future; and she left it in her will that if she died I was to have £50 given to me, to put me in the way of earning my living. It was this sum, she said, she had set apart to give me herself if she was alive when I left the hospital sufficiently strong.

'Well, by the goodness of God, my back did get stronger, and as time went on I began to move about on a pair of crutches. It was a proud day when I could first

walk alone, and felt that I was independent. It perhaps seems a strange pride, considering what I am; but after all there is a vast difference between a little 'strength and no strength, a little sight and no sight. I once knew a man who had been blind for six months, and who then recovered a glimmer of sight, enough to enable him to get about without help, and I have heard him say that that little sight made all the difference in the world to him, and that he thanked God for it more gratefully than ever he did for the perfect sight of his early days. And just so I thank God for my independence, though it IS only on crutches.

'And yet what should I have done without the friends who came to my help? It is wonderful how kind people were! One and another thought for me and planned for me, and at last, when I was about eighteen, I began the work I do now, and as years went on I got a little business together, and settled down in this court. And so here I am, a monument of God's love and mercy, with a dear little niece to love me and look after me, eh? Now has not God been "Good Father" to help me through all that, and bring me here and let you come to me?'

"Oh, Uncle Bob! It was good: it is so nice! "

What the ' little one' precisely meant is not so clear, but Uncle Bob seemed to understand, and he did not attempt to interrupt a rather long silence with Lizzie. She fell a-thinking. Both went on with the work of fastening the articles to the branches of the Christmas tree.

She was musing over Uncle Bob's concluding question, and he was glad to see it working so deeply in her mind. It is good to let thoughts sink down into the heart quietly. We often spoil lessons hurrying the work too quickly.