

bodies the principle of nationality and the inalienable right of racial groups to form separate states, in itself an underlying cause of the World War.

Italy, from the very first day of the war, has had unwavering confidence in the final and complete triumph of the Allied cause. Her armies in the field

have recently suffered serious reverses. However, the defeat of Prussianism, the emancipation of their country from German economic control, and the redemption of the Italian lands still held by Austria, including the incorporation of *Italia redenta* in the kingdom, still remain the high purpose of the people of Italy.

THE FRENCH

(AS SEEN BY AN AMERICAN)

BY EDITH WHARTON

I



HE president of an American university, lately called to France on business connected with the war, owned to me the other day, with a boyish pleasure in the confession: "I'm head over ears in love with France. I've completely lost my balance, and the passion grows with every day I spend here."

The state of being "in love with France" is no new one to Americans; but hitherto it has usually been the result of some social or æsthetic attraction. Many Americans have been in love with France because of her cathedrals and her museums; some because of her conversation and her manners; others because of her philosophy and her literature; the greater number, probably, because of her clothes and her cooking.

None of these elements entered—unless indirectly—into the pure flame with which the speaker burned. Summoned to France (where he had not been for many years) to undertake an urgent task, he had put his hand to it at once, without allowing himself even a day of private delectation; and what he was in love with, to the point of dithyramb and disequilibrium, was the beauty of the French character as revealed to him after three years of an unparalleled ordeal.

The interest of the confession is in the

fact that he had been brought in contact with French character at the point where it is supposed to be weakest. He had been invited, as an acknowledged expert, to infuse up-to-date "efficiency" into obsolete methods; he had been caught in the net of official red tape, had breathed the stagnant air of an old bureaucracy, had bumped into prejudices of which the origin is lost in the mist of ages, had struggled against inertia and tried to put form into vagueness; and he had emerged from the conflict the humble and fervent admirer of the people whom Americans, just now, are perhaps a shade too prone to think it their special mission to educate and enlighten.

The incident raises certain questions in the impartial mind; and the first is, whether the particular kind of efficiency that America is so eagerly and affectionately bringing to France is quite as important in the making of national character as it would flatter us to think. No one, probably, doubts whether it is useful for France to acquire better commercial and industrial methods; certainly the French do not appear to. Their eagerness for enlightenment is touching—and perilous to the modesty of the enlighteners. But the fact remains that here is a people avowedly backward in all that America includes in the vast term of "business methods," and yet so forward in other qualities that such witnesses as my university president, and

every other American observer of his stamp, concur in admitting—or rather glory in proclaiming—the superiority of the people they have been called upon to teach.

The obvious conclusion seems to be that, useful as our type of efficiency is to a nation in France's present situation, there are other elements more essential in the long run to the making of national greatness; and that France has had the gift of secreting these elements from the very dawn of her long and magnificent history.

The next question is: What are the elements? But the answer must be prefaced by a word of restriction.

II

THERE are only two ways of judging the character of a people: either, if one is of them, by finding the clew to their idiosyncrasies in one's self and one's antecedents; or, if one is a stranger, by seeking it in the contrasts between the aspirations and the results of the race one is studying and those of one's own people. If a stranger presumes to judge the character of a nation, it can be only relatively, obliquely, and on the basis of perpetual comparison and qualification. The observer must say, not, "The French are this or that," but, "The French seem to me, an American" (or whatever else), "this or that." The moment the critic forgets this, his comments become impertinence, his conclusions fatuity.

This does not necessarily imply that foreign observation is without interest, either to the foreigner or to the race he tries to interpret. The very quality of foreignness has its use in testing national character; it is often the acid that brings out the invisible writing. Facts which seem small and insignificant to people to whom they are a part of daily habit may have unsuspected importance in the explanation of national peculiarities; and just such facts often take extraordinary relief in the eye of the alien observer. The man who writes his memoirs too often forgets to tell you what the house he was born in looked like; his foreign biographer notes every detail of its furniture. Nothing is everywhere and always insignifi-

cant, and the chief excuse of observation from the outside is that it often emphasizes (even if it also distorts) the importance of unregarded facts.

III

THIS restriction established, one may turn back to the question: What are the elements of character that have made France *France*?

One of the best ways of finding out why a race is what it is, is to pick out the words that preponderate in its speech and its literature, and then try to define the special meaning it gives them.

The French people are one of the most ascetic and the most laborious in Europe; yet the four words that preponderate in French speech and literature are: Glory, love, voluptuousness, and pleasure. Before the Puritan reflex causes the reader to fling aside the page polluted by this statement, it will be worth his while to translate these four words into *la gloire, l'amour, la volupté, le plaisir*, and then (if he knows French and the French well enough) consider what they mean in the language of Corneille and Pascal. For it must be understood that they have no equivalents in the English consciousness, and that, if it were sought to explain the fundamental difference between the exiles of the *Mayflower* and the conquerors of Valmy and Jéna, it would probably best be illustrated by the totally different significance of "love and glory" and "amour et gloire."

To begin with "la gloire": we must resign ourselves to the fact that we do not *really know* what the French mean when they say it—what, for instance, Montesquieu had in mind when he wrote of Sparta: "The only object of the Lacedæmonians was liberty, the only advantage it gave them was glory." At best, if we are intelligent and sympathetic enough to have entered a little way into the French psychology, we know that they mean something infinitely larger, deeper, and subtler than we mean by "glory." The proof is that the Anglo-Saxon is taught *not* to do great deeds for "glory," while the French, unsurpassed in great deeds, have always avowedly done them for "la gloire."

It is obvious that the sense of duty has a large part in the French conception of glory: perhaps one might risk defining it as duty with a *panache*. But that only brings one to another untranslatable word. To put a *panache*—a plume, an ornament—on a prosaic deed is an act so eminently French that one seeks in vain for its English equivalent; it would verge on the grotesque to define “la gloire” as duty wearing an *aigrette*! The whole conception of “la gloire” is linked with the profoundly French conviction that the lily *should* be gilded; that, however lofty and beautiful a man’s act or his purpose, it gains by being performed with what the French (in a word which for them has no implication of effeminacy) call “elegance.” Indeed, the higher, the more beautiful, the gesture or the act, the more it seems to them to call for adornment, the more it gains by being given relief. And thus, by the very appositeness of the word *relief*, one is led to perceive that “la gloire” as an incentive to high action is essentially the conception of a people in whom the plastic sense has always prevailed. The idea of “dying in beauty” certainly originated with the Latin race, though a Scandinavian playwright was left, incongruously enough, to find a phrase for it.

The case is the same with “love” and “amour”; but here the difference is more visible, and the meaning of “amour” easier to arrive at. Again, as with “gloire,” the content is greater than that of our “love.” “Amour,” to the French, means the undivided total of the complex sensations and emotions that a man and a woman may inspire in each other; whereas “love,” since the days of the Elizabethans, has never, to Anglo-Saxons, been more than two halves of a word—one half all purity and poetry, the other all pruriency and prose. And gradually the latter half has been discarded, as too unworthy of association with the loftier meanings of the word, and “love” remains—at least in the press and in the household—a relation as innocuous, and as undisturbing to social conventions and business routine, as the tamest ties of consanguinity.

Is it not possible that the determination to keep these two halves apart has

diminished the one and degraded the other, to the loss of human nature in the round? The Anglo-Saxon answer is, of course, that love is not license; but first let us see what meaning is left to “love” in a society where it is supposed to determine marriage, and yet to ignore the transiency of sexual attraction. At best, it seems to designate a boy-and-girl fancy not much more mature than a taste for dolls or marbles. In the light of that definition, has not license kept the better part?

It may be argued that human nature is everywhere fundamentally the same, and that, though one race lies about its deepest impulses, while another speaks the truth about them, the result in conduct is not very different. Is either of these affirmations exact? If human nature, at bottom, is everywhere the same, such deep layers of different habits, prejudices, and beliefs have been formed above its foundation that it is rather misleading to test resemblances by what one digs up at the roots. Secondary motives of conduct are widely divergent in different countries, and they are the motives that control civilized societies except when some catastrophe throws them back to the state of naked man.

To understand the difference between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon idea of love one must first of all understand the difference between the Latin and Anglo-Saxon conceptions of marriage. In a society where marriage is supposed to be determined solely by reciprocal inclination, and to bind the contracting parties not only to a social but to a physical life-long loyalty, love, which never has accepted, and never will accept, such bonds, immediately becomes a pariah and a sinner. This is the Anglo-Saxon point of view. How many critics of the French conception of love have taken the trouble to consider first their idea of marriage?

Marriage, in France, is regarded as founded for the family and not for the husband and wife. It is designed not to make two people individually happy for a longer or shorter time, but to secure their permanent well-being as associates in the foundation of a home and the procreation of a family. Such an arrangement must needs be based on what is

most permanent in human states of feeling, and least dependent on the accidents of beauty, youth, and novelty. Community of tradition, of education, and, above all, of the parental feeling, are judged to be the sentiments most likely to form a lasting tie between the average man and woman; and the French marriage is built on parenthood, not on passion.

An illustration of the radical contradiction between such a view of marriage and that of the English races is found in the following extract from a notice of a play lately produced (with success) in London:

"After two months of marriage a young girl discovers that her husband married her because he wanted a son. *That is enough. She will have no more to do with him.* So he goes off to fulfil a mining engagement in Peru, and she hides herself in the country. . . ."

It would be impossible to exaggerate the bewilderment and disgust with which any wife or husband in France, whether young or middle-aged, would read the cryptic sentences I have italicized. "What," they would ask, "did the girl suppose he had married her for? And what did she *want* to be married for? And what is marriage for, if not for that?"

The French bride is no longer taken from a convent at sixteen to be flung into the arms of an unknown bridegroom. As emancipation has progressed, the young girl has been allowed a voice in choosing her husband; but what is the result? That in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred her choice is governed by the same considerations. The notion of marriage as a kind of superior business association, based on community of class, of political and religious opinion, and on a fair exchange of advantages (where one, for instance, brings money and the other position), is so ingrained in the French social organization that the modern girl accepts it intelligently, just as her puppet grandmother bowed to it passively.

From this important act of life the notion of love is tacitly excluded; not because love is thought unimportant, but on account of its very importance, and of the fact that it is not conceivably to be fitted into any stable association between man and woman. It is because the French

have refused to cut love in two that they have not attempted to subordinate it to the organization of the family. They have left it out because there was no room for it, and also because it moves to a different rhythm, and keeps different seasons. It is because they refuse to regard it either as merely an exchange of ethereal vows or as a sensual gratification; because, on the contrary, they believe, with Coleridge, that

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame,"

that they frankly recognize its right to its own place in life.

What, then, is the place they give to the disturbing element? They treat it—the answer might be—as the poetry of life. For the French, simply because they are the most realistic people in the world, are also the most romantic. They have judged that the family and the state cannot be built up on poetry, but they have not felt that for that reason poetry was to be banished from their republic. They have decided that love is too grave a matter for boys and girls, and not grave enough to form the basis of marriage; but in the relations between grown people, apart from their permanent ties (and in the deepest consciousness of the French, marriage still remains indissoluble), they allow it, frankly and amply, the part it furtively and shabbily, but no less ubiquitously, plays in Puritan societies.

It is not intended here to weigh the relative advantages of this view of life and the other; what has been sought is to state fairly the reasons why marriage, being taken more seriously and less vaguely by the French, there remains an allotted place for love in their more precisely ordered social economy. Nevertheless, it is fairly obvious that, except in a world where the claims of the body social are very perfectly balanced against those of the body individual, to give such a place to passion is to risk being submerged by it. A society which puts love beyond the law, and then pays it such heavy toll, subjects itself to the most terrible of Camorras.

The French are one of the most ascetic races in the world; and that is perhaps the reason why the meaning they give to the word "volupté" is free from the vulgarity of our "voluptuousness." The latter suggests to most people a cross-legged sultan in a fat seraglio; "volupté" means the intangible charm that imagination extracts from things tangible. "Volupté" means the "Ode to the Nightingale" and the "Ode to a Grecian Urn"; it means Romeo and Juliet as well as Antony and Cleopatra. But if we have the thing, one may ask, what does the word matter? Every language is always losing word-values, even where the sense of the word survives.

The answer is that the French sense of "volupté" is found only exceptionally in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, whereas it is part of the imaginative make-up of the whole French race. One turns to Shakespeare or Keats to find it formulated in our speech; in France it underlies the whole view of life. And this brings one, of course, to the inevitable conclusion that the French are a race of creative artists, and that artistic creativeness requires first a free play of the mind on all the facts of life, and secondly the sensuous sensibility that sees beyond tangible beauty to the aura surrounding it.

The French possess the quality and have always claimed the privilege. And from their freedom of view combined with their sensuous sensibility they have extracted the sensation they call "le plaisir," which is something so much more definite and more evocative than what we mean when we speak of pleasure. "Le plaisir" stands for the frankly permitted, the freely taken, delight of the senses, the direct enjoyment of the fruit of the tree called golden. No suggestions of furtive vice degrade or coarsen it, because it has, like love, its open place in speech and practice. It has found its expression in English also, but only on the lips of genius: for instance, in the "bursting of joy's grape" in the "Ode to Melancholy" (it is always in Keats that one seeks such utterances); whereas to the French it is part of the general fearless and joyful contact with life. And that is why it has kept its finer meaning, instead of being debased by incomprehension.

IV

THE French are passionate and pleasure-loving; but they are above all ascetic and laborious. And it is only out of a union of these supposedly contradictory qualities that so fine a thing as the French temperament could have come.

The industry of the French is universally celebrated; but many—even among their own race—might ask what justifies the statement that they are ascetic. The fact is, the word, which in reality indicates merely a natural indifference to material well-being, has come, in modern speech, to have a narrower and a penitential meaning. It is supposed to imply a moral judgment, whereas it refers only to the attitude taken toward the creature comforts. A man, or a nation, may wear homespun and live on locusts, and yet be immoderately addicted to the lusts of the eye and of the flesh. Asceticism means the serene ability to get on without *comfort*, and comfort is an Anglo-Saxon invention which the Latins have never really understood or felt the want of. What they need (and there is no relation between the needs) is splendor on occasion, and beauty and fulness of experience always. They do not care for the raw material of sensation: food must be exquisitely cooked, emotion eloquently expressed, desire emotionally heightened, every experience must be transmuted into terms of beauty before it touches their imagination.

This fastidiousness, this tendency always to select and eliminate, and refine their sensations, is united to that stoic indifference to dirt, discomfort, bad air, damp, cold, and whatever Anglo-Saxons describe as "inconvenience" in the general organization of life, from the bathroom to the banking system, which gives the French leisure of spirit for enjoyment, and strength of heart for war. It enables, and has always enabled, a people addicted to pleasure and unused to the discipline of sport, to turn at a moment's notice into the greatest fighters that history has known. All the French need to effect this transformation is a "great argument"; once the spring of imagination touched, the body obeys it with a

dash and an endurance that no discipline, whether Spartan or Prussian, ever succeeded in outdoing.

This fearless and joyful people, so ardently individual and so frankly realistic, have another safeguard against excess in their almost Chinese reverence for the ritual of manners. It is fortunate that they have preserved, through every political revolution, this sense of the importance of ceremony, for they are without the compensating respect for the rights of others which eases intercourse in Anglo-Saxon countries. Any view of the French that considers them as possessing the instinct of liberty is misleading; what they have always understood is equality—a different matter—and even that, as one of the most acute among their recent political writers has said, “on condition that each man commands.” Their past history, and above all the geographical situation which has conditioned it, must be kept in view to understand the French indifference to the rights of others, and the corrective for that indifference which their exquisite sense of sociability provides.

For over a thousand years France has had to maintain herself in the teeth of an aggressive Europe, and to do so she has required a strong central government and a sense of social discipline. Her great kings were forever strengthening her by their resistance to the scattered feudal opposition. Richelieu and Louis XIV finally broke this opposition, and left France united against Europe, but deprived of the sense of individual freedom, and needing to feel the pressure of an “administration” on her neck. Imagination, intellectual energy, and every form of artistic activity, found their outlet in social intercourse, and France created polite society—one more work of art in the long list of her creations.

The French conception of society is hierarchical and administrative, as her government (under whatever name) has so long been. Every social situation has its appropriate gestures and its almost fixed vocabulary, and nothing, for example, is more puzzling to the French than the fact that the English, a race whose civilization they regard as in some respects superior to their own, have only

two or three ways of beginning and ending their letters.

This ritual view of politeness makes it difficult of application in undetermined cases, and therefore it often gets left out in emergencies. The complaint of Anglo-Saxons that, in travelling in France, they see little of the much-vaunted French courtesy, is not unjustified. The French are not courteous from any vague sense of good-will toward mankind; they regard politeness as a coin with which certain things are obtainable, and being notably thrifty they are cautious about spending it on strangers. But the disillusion of the traveller often arises in part from his own ignorance of the most elementary French forms: of the “*Bonjour, Madame*,” on entering and leaving a shop, of the fact that a visitor should always, on taking leave, be conducted to the outer door, and a gentleman (of the old school) bidden not to remain uncovered when he stops to speak to a lady in the street; of the “*Merçi*” that should follow every service, however slight, the “*Après vous*” which makes way, with ceremonious insistence, for the person who happens to be entering a door with one. In these respects, Anglo-Saxons, by their lack of “form” (and their lack of perception), are perpetually giving unintentional offense. But small social fashions are oddly different in different countries and vary absurdly in succeeding generations. The French gentleman does not uncover in a lift or in a museum, because he considers these places as public as the street; he does not, after the manner of the newest-of-all American, jump up like a Jack-in-the-box (and remain standing at attention) every time the woman he is calling on rises from her seat, because he considers such gymnastics fatal to social ease; but he is shocked by the way in which Americans loll and sprawl when they are seated, and equally bewildered by their excess of ceremony on some occasions, and their startling familiarity on others.

Such misunderstandings are inevitable between people of different speech and traditions. If French and Americans are both (as their newspapers assure us) “democratic,” it gives a notion of how much the term covers! At any rate, in the older race there is a tradition of

trained and cultivated politeness that flowers, at its best, into a simplicity democratic in the finest sense. Compared to it, our politeness is apt to be rather stagy, as our ease is at times a little boorish.

V

It will be remembered that Paolo and Francesca are met by Dante just beyond the fatal gateway, in what might be called the temperate zone of the infernal regions. In the society of dangerously agreeable fellow-sinners they "go forever on the accursed air," telling their beautiful tale to sympathizing visitors from above; and as, unlike the majority of mortal lovers, they seem not to dread an eternity together, and as they feel no exaggerated remorse for their sin, their punishment is the mildest in the poet's list of expiations. There is all the width of hell between the "Divine Comedy" and the "Scarlet Letter"!

Far different is the lot of the dishonest man of business and of the traitor to the state. For these two offenders against the political and social order the ultimate horrors of the pit are reserved. The difference between their fate and that of the lovers is like that between the lot of an aviator in an eternally invulnerable aeroplane and of a stoker in the burning hold of an eternally torpedoed ship. On this distinction between the two classes of offenses—the antilegal and the antisocial—the whole fabric of Latin morality is based.

The moralists and theologians of the Middle Ages, agitated as no other age has been by the problem of death and the life after death, worked out the great scheme of moral retribution on which the "Divine Comedy" is based. This system of punishment is the result of a purely Latin and social conception of order. In it individualism has no place. It is based on the interests of the family, and of that larger family formed by the commune or the state; and it distinguishes, implicitly if not outspokenly, between the wrong that has far-reaching social consequences and that which injures only one or two persons, or perhaps only the moral sense of the offender.

The French have continued to accept

this classification of offenses. They continue to think the sin against the public conscience far graver than that against any private person. If in France there is a distinction between private and business morality it is exactly the reverse of that prevailing in America, and the French conscience rejects with abhorrence the business complaisances which the rigidly virtuous American too often regards as not immoral because not indictable. "Business" tends everywhere to subdue its victims to what they work in, and it is not meant to suggest that every French financier is irreproachable, or that France has not had more than her share of glaring financial scandals, but that among the real French, uncontaminated by cosmopolitan influences, and especially in the class of small shopkeepers and in the upper bourgeoisie, business probity is higher, and above all *more sensitive*, than in America. It is not only, or always, through indolence that France has remained backward in certain forms of efficiency.

It would be misleading to conclude that this sensitiveness is based on a respect for the rights of others. The French, it must be repeated, are as a race indifferent to the rights of others. In the people and the lower middle class (and how much higher up!) the traditional attitude is: "Why should I do my neighbor a good turn when he may be getting the better of me in some way I haven't found out?" The French are not generous, and they are not trustful. They do not willingly credit their neighbors with sentiments as disinterested as their own. But deep in their very bones is something that was called "the point of honour" when there was an aristocracy to lay exclusive claim to it, but that has, in reality, always permeated the whole fabric of the race. It is just as untranslatable as the "panache" into which it has flowered on so many immortal battle-fields; and it regulates the conscience of one of the most avaricious and least compassionate of peoples in their business relations, as it regulated the conduct in the field of the knights of chivalry and of the *parvenu* heroes of Napoleon.

It all comes back, perhaps, to the extraordinarily true French sense of values.

As a people, the French have moral taste, and an ear for the "still small voice"; they know what is worth while, and they despise most of the benefits that accrue from a clever disregard of their own standards. It has been the fashion among certain of their own critics to inveigh against French "taste" and French "measure," and to celebrate the supposed lack of these qualities in the Anglo-Saxon races as giving a freer play to genius and a larger scope to all kinds of audacious enterprise. It is evident that if a new continent is to be made habitable, or a new prosody to be created, the business "point of honour" in the one case, and the French Academy in the other, may seriously hamper the task; but in the minor transactions of commerce and culture perhaps such restrictive influences are worth more to civilization than a mediocre license.

VI

MANY years ago, during a voyage in the Mediterranean, the yacht on which I was cruising was driven by bad weather to take shelter in a small harbor on the Mainote coast. The country, at the time, was not considered particularly safe, and before landing we consulted the guide-book to see what reception we were likely to meet with.

This is the answer we found: "The inhabitants are brave, hospitable, and generous, but fierce, treacherous, vindictive, and given to acts of piracy, robbery, and wreckage."

Perhaps the foregoing attempt to define some attributes of the French character may seem as incoherent as this summary. At any rate, the endeavor to strike a balance between seemingly contradictory traits disposed one to indulgence toward the anonymous student of the Mainotes.

No civilized race has gone as unerr-

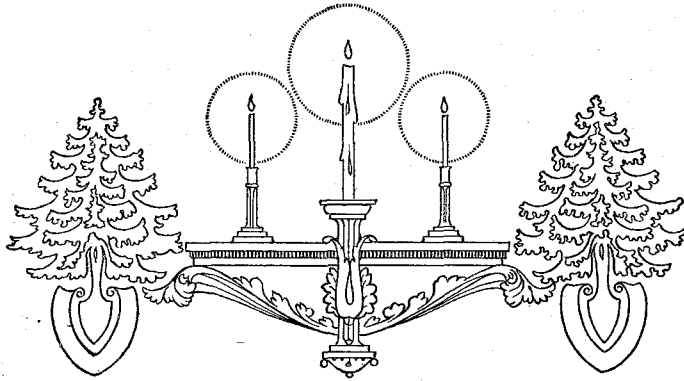
ingly as the French toward the natural sources of enjoyment; none has been so unashamed of instinct. Yet none has been more enslaved by social conventions, small complicated observances based on long-past conditions of life. No race has shown more collective magnanimity on great occasions, more pettiness and hardness in small dealings between individuals. Of no great people would it be truer to say that, like the Mainote tribesmen, they are generous and brave, yet fierce and vindictive. No people are more capable of improvising greatness, yet more afraid of the least initiative in ordinary matters. No people are more sceptical and more religious, more realistic and more romantic, more irritable and nervous, yet more capable of a long patience and a dauntless calm.

Such are the conclusions to which the foreign observer is perplexedly led. It would probably take kinship of blood to resolve them into a harmonious interpretation of the French character.

All that the looker-on may venture is to say: Some of the characteristics I have noted seem unamiable, others dangerously disintegrating, others provokingly unprogressive. But when you have summed up the whole you will be forced to conclude that as long as enriching life is more than preserving it, as long as culture is superior to business efficiency, as long as poetry and imagination and reverence are higher and more precious elements of civilization than telephones or plumbing, as long as truth is more bracing than hypocrisy, and wit more wholesome than dulness, so long will France remain greater than any nation that has not her ideals.

The best answer to every criticism of French weakness or French shortcomings is the conclusive one: *Look at the results!* Read her history, study her art, follow up the current of her ideas; then look about you, and you will see that the whole world is full of her spilt glory.





THE RED CANDLE

By Temple Bailey

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN NEWTON HOWITT

IT was so cold that the world seemed as stiff and stark as a poet's hell. A little moon was frozen against a pallid sky. The old dark houses with their towers and gables wore the rigid look of iron edifices. The saint over the church door at the corner had an icicle on his nose. Even the street lights shone faint and benumbed through clouded glass.

Ostrander, with his blood like ice within his veins, yearned for a Scriptural purgatory with red fire and flame. To be warm would be heaven. It was a wise old Dante who had made hell cold!

As he crossed the threshold of his filthy tenement he felt for the first time a sense of its shelter. Within its walls there was something that approached warmth, and in his room at the top there was a bed with a blanket.

Making his way toward the bed and its promise of comfort, he was stopped on the second stairway by a voice which came out of the dark.

"Mr. Tony, you didn't see our tree."

Peering down, he answered the voice: "I was going up to get warm."

"Milly said to tell you that we had a fire."

"A real fire, Pussy? I didn't know that there was one in the world."

He came down again to the first floor. Pussy was waiting—a freckled dot of a child tied up in a man's coat.

The fire was in a small round stove.

On top of the stove something was boiling. The room was neat but bare, the stove, a table, and three chairs its only furnishing. In a room beyond were two beds covered with patchwork quilts.

On the table was a tree. It was a Christmas tree—just a branch of pine and some cheap spangly things. The mother of the children sewed all day and late into the night. She had worked a little longer each night for a month that the children might have the tree.

There was no light in the room but that of a small and smoky lamp.

Milly spoke of it. "We ought to have candles."

Ostrander, shrugged close to the stove, with his hands out to its heat, knew that they ought to have electric lights, colored ones, a hundred perhaps, and a tree that touched the stars!

But he said: "When I go out I'll bring you a red candle—a long one—and we'll put it on the shelf over the table."

Milly, who was resting her tired young body in a big rocker with the baby in her arms, asked: "Can we put it in a bottle or stand it in a cup? We haven't any candlestick."

"We can do better than that," he told her, "with a saucer turned upside down and covered with salt to look like snow."

Pussy, economically anxious, asked, "Can we eat the salt afterward?"

"Of course."