# The Last Gift

Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman

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ROBINSON CARNES pilgrimmed along the country road between Sanderson and Elmville. He wore a shabby clerical suit, and he carried a rusty black bag which might have contained sermons. It did actually hold one sermon, a favorite which he had delivered many times in many pulpits, and in which he felt a certain covert pride of authorship.

The bag contained, besides the sermon, two old shirts with frayed cuffs, three collars, one pocket−handkerchief, a Bible, and a few ancient toilet articles. These were all his worldly goods, except the clothes he wore, and a matter of forty−odd cents in his old wallet. Robinson Carnes subsisted after a curious parasitical fashion. He travelled about the country with his rusty black bag, journeying from place to place — no matter what place, so long as it held an evangelical church. Straight to the parson of the church he went, stated his name and calling, produced certain vouchers in proof of the same, and inquired if he knew of any opening for a clergyman out of employment, if he had heard of any country pulpit in which an itinerant preacher might find humble harbor. He never obtained any permanent situation; he sometimes supplied a pulpit for a day, or officiated at a funeral or wedding, but that was all. But he never failed to receive hospitality, some sufficient meals, and a lodging for one night at least in the parsonage guest−chamber.

Although Carnes's living was so precarious, he looked neither forlorn nor hungry. He had, in fact, had at noon an excellent dinner of roast beef at the home of the Presbyterian minister in Sanderson. It was the day before Christmas, and a certain subtle stir of festive significance was in the very air. Every now and then a wagon laden with young hemlocks, and trailing with greens, passed him. The road was strewn with evergreen sprigs and stray branches, with an occasional jewel−like sprinkle of holly berries. Often he heard a silvery burst of laughter and chatter, and boys and girls appeared from a skirting wood with their arms laden with green vines and branches. He also met country carriages whose occupants had their laps heaped with parcels of Christmas presents. These last gave the tramp preacher a feeling of melancholy so intense that it amounted to pain. It was to him like the sight of a tavern to a drunkard when his pockets are empty and his thirst is great. It touched Robinson Carnes in his tenderest point. He had fallen a victim in early youth to a singular species of spiritual dissipation. Possessed by nature of a most unselfish love for his kind, and an involuntary generosity, this tendency, laudable in itself, had become in time like a flower run wild until it was a weed. His love of giving amounted to a pure and innocent but unruly passion. It had at one time assumed such proportions that it barely escaped being recognized as actual mania. As it was, people, even those who had benefited by his reckless generosity, spoke of him as a mild idiot.

There had been a day of plenty with him, for he had fallen joint heir to a large and reasonably profitable New England farm, and a small sum in bank. The other heir was his younger brother. His brother had just married; Robinson told him to live on the farm and give him a small percentage of the profits yearly. When the crops failed through bad weather and mismanagement, he said easily, without the slightest sense of self−sacrifice, that the brother need not pay him the percentage that year. The brother did not pay it, as a matter of course, the next year, and in fact never did. In three years the brother's wife was ailing, and the family increasing, and he was in debt for the taxes. Robinson paid them all, and he continued paying them as long as his money in the bank lasted. He wished his brother to keep his intact, on account of his family. Then he gave from his poor salary to everything and everybody. Then he was in debt for his board. He rented a small room, and lived, it was said, on oatmeal porridge until the debt was paid.

Robinson Carnes had a fierce honesty. When he was in debt, he felt, for the first time in his life, disgraced, and like hiding his head. He often reflected with the greatest shame upon that period of his life when he had an impulse to go out of his way to avoid the woman whom he owed. He felt nothing like it now, although to some his present mode of existence might savor of beggary. He considered that in some fashion he generally rendered an equivalent for the hospitality which kept the breath of life in him. Sometimes the minister who entertained him was ailing, and he preached the sermon in his black bag in his stead. Sometimes he did some copying for him; often he had toiled to good purpose at his wood−pile or in his garden; he had even assisted the minister's wife with her carpet−beating in her spring cleaning. He had now nothing to be ashamed of, but he felt his very memory burn with shame when he remembered that time of debt. That had been the end of his career as a regularly settled minister. People might have forgiven the debt, but they could not forgive nor overlook the fact that while in such dire straits he had given away the only decent coat which he owned to wear in the pulpit, and also that he had given away to a needy family, swarming with half−fed children, the cakes and pies with which some female members of his parish had presented him to alleviate his oatmeal diet. That last had in reality decided the matter. He was requested to resign.

So Robinson Carnes resigned his pastorate, and had never been successful in obtaining another. He went out of the village on foot. He had given away every dollar of the last instalment of his meagre salary to a woman in sore straits. He had given away his trunk years ago to a young man about to be married and settle in the West. He regretted leaving his sermons behind because of the lack of a trunk. He stored them in a barrel in the garret of one of the deacon's houses. He stowed away what he could of his poor little possessions in his black bag, feeling thankful that no one had seemed to need that also. Since he had given away his best coat, he had only his old one, which was very shabby. When he shook hands with his half−hearted friends at parting, he was careful not to raise his right arm too high, lest he reveal a sad rip in the under−arm seam. Since, he had had several coats bestowed upon him by his clerical friends, when an old one was on the verge of total disruption, but the new coat was always at variance as to its right under−arm seams. Robinson Carnes had thereby acquired such an exceedingly cautious habit of extending his right arm as to give rise to frequent inquiries whether he had put his shoulder out of joint, or had rheumatism. Now the ripped seam was concealed by an old but very respectable and warm overcoat which the Presbyterian minister in Sanderson had bestowed upon him, and which he had requited by an interpretation of the original Greek of one of the gospels, which aided the minister materially in the composition of his Christmas sermons. Carnes was an excellent Hebrew and Greek scholar, and his entertainer was rusty and had never been very proficient. Robinson had been in the theological seminary with this man, and had often come to his aid when there. Robinson had also set up the Christmas tree for the Sunday−school in the church vestry. He was exceedingly skilful with his hands. The Christmas tree had awakened in him the old passion, and his face saddened as he looked at the inviting spread of branches.

"I wish I had something to hang on the tree for your children and the Sunday−school," he said, wistfully, to the minister; and the other man, who knew his history, received his speech in meaning silence. But when Carnes repeated his remark, being anxious that his poor little gift of a Christmas wish, which was all that he had to offer, might at least be accepted, the other replied coldly that one's first duty was to one's self, and unjustified giving was pauperizing to the giver and the recipient.

Then poor Robinson Carnes, abashed, for he understood the purport of the speech, bade the minister good−by meekly, and went his way. When he saw the other Christmas trees on the road to Elmville, his wistful sadness became intensified. He felt the full bitterness of having absolutely nothing to give, of having even a kindly wish scorned when the wish was his last coin. He felt utterly bankrupt as to benefits towards his fellow−creatures, that sorest bankruptcy for him who can understand it.

Carnes had just watched a wagon loaded with Christmas greens pass slowly out of sight around a bend in the road, when he came unexpectedly upon a forlorn company. They were so forlorn, and so unusual in the heart of a prosperous State, that he could hardly believe his eyes at first. They seemed impossible. There were six of them in all: a man, two women — one young and one old — and three children: one a baby two years old, the others five

and eight. The man stood bolt−upright, staring straight ahead with blank eyes; the women were seated on the low stone wall which bordered the road. The younger, the mother, held the five−year−old child; the older, evidently the grandmother, held the youngest; the eldest — all were girls — sat apart, huddled upon herself, her small back hooped, hugging herself with her thin arms in an effort to keep warm. As Carnes drew near, she looked at him, and an impulse of flight was evident in her eyes. The younger of the two women surveyed him with a sort of apathy which partook of anger. The youngest child, in the old woman's lap, was wailing aloud. The grandmother did not try to hush it. Her face, full of a dumb appeal to and questioning of something which Carnes felt dimly was beyond him, gazed over the small head in a soiled white hood which beat wrathfully against her withered bosom. The woman wore an old shawl which was warm; she kept a corner well wrapped about the crying child. The younger woman was very thinly clad. Her hat had a pathetic last summer's rose in it. Now and then a long rigor of chill passed over her; at such times her meagre body seemed to elongate, her arms held the little girl on her lap like two clamps. The man, standing still, with face turned toward the sky over the distant horizon line, gave a glance at Carnes with eyes which bore no curiosity or interest, but were simply indifferent. He looked away again, and Carnes felt that he was forgotten, while his shadow and the man's still intermingled.

Then Carnes broke the silence. He stepped in front of the man. "See here, friend," he said, "what's the matter?"

The man looked at him perforce. He was past words. He had come to that pass where speech as a means of expression seemed superfluous. His look said as much to his questioner. "You ask me what is the matter?" the look said. "Are you blind?" But the question in the man's dull eyes was not resentful. He was not one in whom misery arouses resentment against others or Providence. Fate seemed to have paralyzed him, as the clutch of a carnivorous animal is said to paralyze a victim.

"What is it?" Carnes inquired again. "What is the matter?"

Still the man did not answer, but the younger of the two women did. She spoke with great force, but her lips were stiff, and apparently not a muscle of her face moved. "I'll tell you what the matter is," said she. "He's good for nothing. He's a no−account man. He ain't fit to take care of a family. That's what's the matter." Then the other woman bore her testimony, which was horrible from its intensity and its triviality. It was the tragedy of a pin−prick in a meagre soul.

"He's left my hair−cloth sofy an' my feather bed," said she, in a high shrill plaint.

Then the forlorn male, badgered betwixt the two females of his species, who were, as it often happens with birds, of a finer, fiercer sort than he, broke silence with a feeble note of expostulation. "Now, don't, mother," said he. "You shall hev that sofy and that feather bed agin."

The younger woman rose, setting the little girl on the frozen ground so hard that she began to cry. "Have 'em back? How is she goin' to have 'em back?" she demanded. "There's the hair−cloth sofy she earned and set her eyes by, and there's the feather bed she's always slept on, left over there in Sanderson, stored away in a dirty old barn. How's she goin' to ever get 'em again? What's the poor old woman goin' to sit on an' sleep on?"

"We'll go back an' git 'em," muttered the man. "Don't, Emmy."

"Yes, I will! I'll tell the truth, and I don't care who knows it. You're a no−account man. How are we goin' to git 'em back, I'd like to know? You hain't a cent and you can't get work. If I was a man, I'd git work if it killed me. How is your mother goin' to git that sofy and that feather bed again as long as she lives? And that ain't all — there's all my nice furniture that I worked and earned before I was married; you didn't earn none of it except jest that one bedstead and bureau that you bought. I earned all the other things workin' in the shop myself, and there they all be stored in that dirty old barn to be eaten up by rats, and covered with dust."

"We will get 'em back. Don't, Emmy."

"How'll you get 'em back? You're a good−for−nothin' man. You ain't fit to support a family."

"He's left my sofy an' feather bed," reiterated the old woman.

The old man looked helplessly from one to the other; then he cast a glance at Carnes — that look full of agony and appeal which one man gives another in such a crisis when he is set upon by those whom he cannot fight.

Carnes, when he met his fellow−man's piteous look, felt at once an impulse of partisanship. He stepped close to him and laid a hand on the thin shoulder in the thin coat. "See here, friend," he said, "tell me all about it." The compassion in Carnes's voice was a power in itself; he had, moreover, a great deal of the clergyman evident, as well in his manner as in the cut of his clothes.

The man hesitated a moment, then he began, and the story of his woes flowed like a stream. It was a simple story enough. The man was evidently one of those who work well and faithfully while in harness, like a horse. Taken out, he was naked and helpless and ashamed, without spirit enough to leave his old hitching−posts and beaten roads of life, and gallop in new pastures unbridled. He became a poor nondescript, not knowing what he knew. The man, whose name was William Jarvis, had worked in a shoe factory ever since he was a boy. He had been an industrious and skilled workman, but had met with many vicissitudes. He had left a poor position for an exceedingly lucrative one in a large factory in Sanderson, and had moved there with his family. Then the factory had been closed through the bankruptcy of the owner. Since then he had had a hard time. He had left his family in Sanderson in their little rented house, and he had been about the country seeking in vain for employment. Then he had returned, to find that the old factory was to be reopened in a month's time, and then he could have a job, but every cent of his money was gone, and he was in debt. Not only Jarvis's money was gone, but his credit. The tradesmen had learned to be wary about trusting the shifting factory population.

The rent was due on the house; Jarvis paid that, and was literally penniless. He packed his humble furniture, and stored it in a neighbor's barn, on condition that it should be taken for storage if he did not claim it within a year.

Then he and his family set forth. It was the hopeless, senseless sort of exodus which might have been expected of people like these who deal only with the present, being incapacitated, like some insects, from any but a limited vision in one direction. Carnes received a confused impression, from a confused statement of the man, that they had a hope of being able to reach a town in the northern part of the State, where the wife had some distant relatives, and the others of this poor clan might possibly come to their rescue. They had had a hope of friendly lifts in northward−journeying wagons. But there had been no lifts, and they had advanced only about five miles toward their forlorn Mecca on the day before Christmas. The children were unable to walk farther, and the parents were unable to carry them. The grandmother, too, was at the end of her strength. The weather was very cold, and snow threatened. They were none too warmly clad. They had only the small luggage which they could carry — an old valise, and a bundle tied up in an old shawl. The middle child had an old doll that had lost one arm, her blond wig, and an eye, but was going on her travels in her best, faded pink muslin dress and a bit of blue sash. The child stood sobbing wearily, but she still held fast to the doll. The eldest girl eyed her with tender solicitude. She had outgrown dolls. She got a dingy little handkerchief from her pocket and folded it cornerwise for a shawl; then she got down from the wall and pinned it closely around the doll. "There," she said, "that is better." After that the children themselves felt warmer.

Carnes saw everything — the people, the doll, their poor little possessions, — and an agony of pity, which from the nature of the man and its futility became actual torture, seized him. He looked at the other man who had confided in him, at the women who now seemed to watch him with a lingering hope of assistance. He opened his mouth to speak, but he said nothing. What could he say?"

Then the man, William Jarvis, added something to his poor story. Two weeks before, he had slipped on the ice and injured his shoulder; he had strained it with moving, and it was causing him much distress. Indeed, his face, which was strained with pain as well as misery, bore witness to the truth of that.

The wife had eyed her husband with growing concentration during this last. When he had finished, her face brightened with tenderness; she made a sudden move forward and threw her arms around him, and began to weep in a sort of rage of pity and love and remorse. "Poor Willy! poor Willy!" she sobbed. "Here we've been abusin' you when you've worked like a dog with your shoulder 'most killin' you. You've always done the best you could. I don't care who says you haven't. I'd like to hear anybody say you haven't. I guess they wouldn't darse say it twice to me." She turned on the old woman with unreasoning fury. "Hold your tongue about your old hair−cloth sofy an' your feather bed, grandma!" said she. "Ain't he your own son? I guess you won't die if you lose your old hair−cloth sofy an' your feather bed! The stuffin's all comin' out of your old sofy, anyhow! You'd ought to be ashamed of yourself, grandma! Ain't he your own son?"

"I guess he was my son afore he was your husband," returned the old woman with spirit. "I ain't pesterin' of him any more'n you be, Emmy Jarvis." With that she began to weep shrilly like a child, leaning her face against the head of the crying child in her lap. The little girl with the doll set up a fresh pipe of woe; the doll slipped to the ground. The elder sister got down from the stone wall and gathered it up and fondled it. "You've dropped poor Angelina and hurt her, Nannie," said she, reproachfully.

"Poor Willy!" again sobbed his wife, "you've been treated like a dog by them you had a right to expect something better of, an' I don't care if I do say so."

Again the man's eyes, overlooking his wife's head, sought the other man's for an understanding of his peculiar masculine distress.

Carnes returned the look with such utter comprehension and perfect compassion as would have lifted the other's burden for all time could it have taken practical form. In reality, Carnes, at this juncture, suffered more than the man. Here was a whole family penniless, suffering. Here was a man with the impulse of a thousand Samaritans to bring succor, but positively helpless to lift a finger toward any alleviation of their misery. It became evident to him in a flash what the outside view of the situation would be: that the only course for a man of ordinary sense and reason was to return to Sanderson and notify the authorities of this suicidal venture; that it was his duty for the sake of the helpless children to have them cared for by force, if there was no other way. But still, this course he could not bring himself to follow. It seemed an infringement upon all the poor souls had left in the world — their individual freedom. He could not do it, and yet what else was there to do? He thought of his forty cents, his only available assets against this heavy arrear of pity and generosity, with fury. At that moment the philanthropist without resources, the Samaritan without his flask of oil, was fairly dangerous to himself from this terrible blocking of almost abnormal impulses for good. It seemed to him that he must die or go mad if he could not do something for these people. He cast about his eyes, like a drowning man, and he saw in a field on the left, quite a distance away, a small house; only its chimneys were visible above a gentle slope. A thought struck him. "Wait a moment," he ordered, and leaped the stone wall and ran across the field, crunching the frozen herbage until his footsteps echoed loudly. The forlorn family watched him. It was only a short time before he returned. He caught up the second little girl from the ground. "Come," cried Carnes in an excited voice. "Come. Nobody lives in that house over there! I can get in! There is a shed with hay in it! There's a fireplace! There's plenty of wood to pick up in the grove behind it! Come!"

His tone was wild with elation. Here was something which could be done. It was small, but something. The others were moved by his enthusiasm. Their faces lightened. The father caught the youngest child from the grandmother; the mother took the eldest by the hand. They all started, the old grandmother outracing them, with a quick, short−stepped toddle like a child. "See your mother go," said the wife, and she fairly laughed. In fact, the old woman was almost at her last gasp, and it was an extreme effort of nature, a final spurt of nerve and will.

The house was a substantial cottage, in fair repair. The door at the back was unlocked. Carnes threw it open, and ushered in the people as if they had been his guests. A frightful chill struck them as they entered. It was much colder than outside, with a concentration of chill which overwhelmed like an actual presence of wintry death. The children, all except the eldest girl, who hugged the doll tightly, and whispered to her not to mind, it would be warm pretty soon, began to cry again. This was a new deprivation added to the old. They had expected something from the stranger, and he had betrayed them. The grandmother leaned exhausted against the wall; her lips moved, but nothing could be heard. The wife caught up the youngest crying child and shook her.

"Be still, will you?" she said, in a furious voice. "We've got enough to put up with without your bawling." Then she kissed and fondled it, and her own tears dropped fast on its wet face.

But not one whit of Carnes's enthusiasm abated. He beckoned the man, who sprang to his bidding. They brought wood from the grove behind the house. Carnes built a fire on the old hearth, and he found some old boxes in the little barn. He rigged up some seats with boards, and barrels for backs; he spread hay on the boards for cushions. The warmth and light of the fire filled the room. All of a sudden it was furnished and inhabited. Their faces began to relax and lighten. The awful blue tints of cold gave place to soft rose and white. The children began to laugh.

"What did I tell you?" the eldest girl asked the doll, and she danced it before the ruddy glow. The wife bade her husband sit with his lame shoulder next the fire. The youngest child climbed into her grandmother's lap again, and sat with her thumb in her mouth surveying the fire. She was hungry, but she sucked her own thumb, and she was warm. The old woman nodded peacefully. She had taken off her bonnet, and her white head gleamed with a rosy tint in the firelight.

Carnes was radiant for a few minutes. He stood surveying the transformation he had wrought. "Well, now this is better," he said, and he laughed like a child. Then suddenly his face fell again. This was not a solution of the problem. He had simply stated it. There was no food, there was no permanent shelter. Then the second little girl, who was the most delicate and nervous of them all, began to cry again. "I want somefin to eat," she wailed. Her father, who had been watching them with as much delight as Carnes, also experienced a revulsion. Again he looked at Carnes.

"Yes," said the wife in a bitter tone, "here is a fire and a roof over us, but we may get turned out any minute, if anybody sees the smoke comin' out of the chimney, and there's nothin' to eat."

The eldest little girl's lip quivered. She hugged the doll more closely.

"Don't cry, and you shall have a piece of cake pretty soon," she whispered. The man continued to look at Carnes, who suddenly stood straight and threw up his head with a resolute look. "I'm going, but I will come back very soon," said he, "and then we'll have supper. Don't worry. Put enough wood on the fire to keep warm." Then he went out.

He hurried across the field to the road under the lowering quiet of the gray sky. His resolve was stanch, but his heart failed him. Again the agony of balked compassion was over him. He looked ahead over the reach of frozen highway without a traveller in sight, he looked up at the awful winter sky threatening with storm, and he was in a mood of blasphemy. There was that misery, there was he with the willingness to relieve, and — forty cents. It was a time when money reached a value beyond itself, when it represented the treasure of heaven. This poor forty cents would buy bread, at least, and a little milk. It would keep them alive a few hours, but that was only a part of the difficulty solved. The cold was intense, and they were not adequately protected against it. There were an old woman and three children. He was only giving them the most ephemeral aid, and what would come next?

Carnes, standing there in the road all alone, mechanically thrust his hand in his pocket for the feel of his forty cents; but instead of putting his hand in his own coat pocket, he thrust it in the pocket of the overcoat which the

minister in Sanderson had given him. He pulled out, instead of his own poor old wallet, a prosperous portly one of black seal−skin. He did not at first realize what it meant. He stood staring vacuously. Then he knew. The minister in Sanderson had left his own wallet in the overcoat pocket. The coat was one which he had been wearing until his new one had come from the tailor's the day before.

Carnes stood gazing at this pocketbook; then he slowly, with shaking fingers, opened it. There were papers which he saw at a glance were valuable, and there was a large roll of bills. Carnes began counting them slowly. He sat down on the stone wall the while. His legs trembled so that he could scarcely stand. There was over two hundred dollars in bills in the wallet. Carnes sat awhile regarding the bills. A strange expression was coming over his gentle, scholarly, somewhat weak face — an expression evil and unworthy in its original meaning, but, as it were, glorified by the motive which actuated it. The man's face became full of a most angelic greed of money. He was thinking what he could do with only a hundred dollars of that other man's money. He knew with no hesitation that he would rd what would come next?

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Carnes separated a hundred dollars from the rest. He put it in his own old wallet. He replaced the remainder in the minister's, and he went on to Elmville.

It was ten o'clock on Christmas eve before Robinson Carnes, having left the Jarvis family reinstated in their old home, warmed and fed, and happier perhaps than they had ever been or perhaps ever would be, went to the vestry blazing with light in which the Christmas tree was being held. He stood in the door and saw the minister, portly and smiling, seated well forward. As he watched, the minister's name was called, and he received a package. The minister was a man with a wealthy parish; he had, moreover, money of his own, and not a large reputation for giving. Carnes reflected upon this as he stood there. It seemed to him that with such a man his chances of mercy were small. He had his mind steeled for the worst. He considered, as he stood there, his very good chance of arraignment, of imprisonment. "It may mean State prison for me," he thought. Then a wave of happiness came over him. "Anyway," he told himself, "they have the money." He did not conceive of the possibility of the minister taking away the money from that poverty and distress; that was past his imagination. "They have the money," he kept repeating. It also occurred to him, for he was strong in the doctrine of his church creed, that he had possibly incurred a heavier than earthly justice for his deed; and then he told himself again, "Well, they have it."

A mental picture of the family in warmth and comfort in their home came before him, and while he reflected upon theft and its penalty, he smiled like an angel. Presently he called a little boy near by and sent him to the minister.

"Ask Mr. Abbott if he will please see Mr. Carnes a moment," he said. "Say he has something important to tell

him."

Soon the boy returned, and his manner unconsciously aped Mr. Abbot.

"Mr. Abbot says he is sorry, but he cannot leave just now," he said. It was evident that the minister wished to shake off the mendicant of his holy profession.

Carnes took the rebuff meekly, but he bade the boy wait a moment. He took a pencil from his pocket and wrote something on a scrap of paper. He wrote this:

"I found this wallet in your pocket in the coat which you gave me. I have stolen one hundred dollars to relieve the necessities of a poor family. I await your pleasure. Robinson Carnes."

The boy passed up the aisle with the pocket−book and the note. Carnes, watching, saw a sudden convulsive motion of the minister's shoulders in his direction, but he did not turn his head. His name was called again for a present as the boy passed down the aisle, returning to Carnes.

Again the boy unconsciously aped Mr. Abbot's manner as he addressed Carnes. It was conclusive, coldly disapproving, non−retaliative, dismissing. Carnes knew the minister, and he had no doubt. "Mr. Abbot says that he has no need to see you, that you can go when you wish," said the boy. Carnes knew that he was quite free, that no penalty would attach to his theft.

The snow had begun to fall as Robinson Carnes took his way out of Sanderson on the road to Elmville, but the earth had come into a sort of celestial atmosphere which obliterated the storm for human hearts. All around were innocent happiness and festivity, and the display of love by loving−gifts. The poor minister was alone on a stormy road on Christmas eve. He had no presentiment of anything bright in his future: he did not know that he was to find an asylum and a friend for life in the clergyman in the town toward which his face was set. He travelled on, bending his shoulders before the sleety wind. His heart was heavier and heavier before the sense of his own guilt. He felt to the full that he had done a great wrong. He had stolen, and stolen from his benefactor. He had taken off the minister's coat and laid it gently over the back of a settee in the vestry before he left, but that made no difference. If only he had not stolen from the man who had given him his coat. And yet he always had, along with the remorse, that light of great joy which could not be wholly darkened by any thought of self, when he reflected upon the poor family who were happy. He thought that possibly the minister had in reality been glad, although he condemned him. He began to love him and thank him for his generosity. He pulled his thin coat closely around him and went on. He had given the last gift which he had to give — his own honesty.