

One Christmas Night

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It is about a little Italian boy that I am going to tell you this Christmas. His story is a very simple one, I know, yet still I think you may like it as much as I do. The boy's name was Naldo, and he was the son of a well-to-do peasant who owned a cottage and a small vineyard on the hill-side; a vineyard in which Naldo spent many happy hours at vintage time, when in the autumn the great bunches of purple fruit hung, ripened by the summer sun. Not that the sun took leave of San Stefano as soon as the grapes were ripe; for he seemed to love the place and to shine there bright and warm long after turning his back for the winter upon our grey English villages. And little wonder, for the sun seldom looks down upon a fairer or more peaceful spot.

Naldo loved it well with the quiet love of childhood, which takes for granted nothing can be dearer than the home and the surroundings into which God has placed it. I speak of a quiet love, because I think as we grow older we are not always so truly content with our homes and our lot, or if we love the trees and river and fields we have known from babyhood, we are troubled by the fear that we may have to leave them all some day. Children trust the future more into the hands of God, which makes them wise as well as happy, and perhaps that was one of the reasons why our Blessed Lord loved little children, for our Heavenly Father is pleased when we trust Him.

Naldo was a good boy; he could not read or write, but he knew a great deal of his Catechism, and could say his Rosary; and he was fond of the church that looked down into the quiet valley, blessing it and making it so happy and fair. He knew that in the church dwelt Jesus Christ, of Whom Brigida, Naldo's mother, told him so much, and in it, too, was the beautiful Madonna, the pride of all the village. No Madonna could be more wonderful, Naldo felt quite sure, than this one, before which his father and mother, and their forefathers before them, had prayed to the Heavenly Queen, and at whose feet Naldo himself had been laid as a tiny baby after holy Baptism. "For, think not," Brigida was wont to say, "that Our Lady will ever own a sinful child as hers. The dear Child Jesus was so holy, she cannot bear one who is not like to Him. So we had all the stains washed from off your soul before giving you to Christ's Mother, and then we laid you at her feet, clothed in the spotless robe of your Baptism, which Jesus washed so white in His own Precious Blood. O then, Naldo, the heart of Our Lady was full of joy, and seeing the white robe, she took you for her child. My son, never stain that robe by grievous sin, else the Madonna, seeing that you have despised Jesus and sullied what He had washed so white, will turn away in anger and say, 'This is no child of mine!'"

So little Naldo used often to go to his dear Madonna and say: "My Mother, never let me stain the white robe of your Son;" and Our Lady heard his prayer, for, thank God, he never did.

But one day a stranger passed through the village, and this stranger told Naldo that there were more beautiful Madonnas to be seen than this one. "Yes, and even more beautiful hills and woods," he added, "for the world, Naldo, is very large and wonderful, and, as God made everything it contains, all is great and good as well as beautiful—at least where man has not spoiled it," he concluded with a sigh.

And Naldo from that time forward began to long very much to see these other lands and yet fairer Madonnas of which the stranger had spoken; as the world was so large and wonderful, it seemed a pity to see only such a little bit of it before one went to Heaven! Wishes sometimes come to pass; and as time went on, Naldo's desire was fulfilled, but it was in a sorrowful way. How it all happened the boy never fully understood. He only knew in a vague kind of way that wicked men, instead of being glad and proud to have God's Vicar for their king as well as Pope, grew restless and discontented, and took his throne from him, to which he had as much right as Naldo's father had to the little cottage and the vineyard on the hill-side.

You will say it seems strange how this could affect a little boy like ours, and yet it did. All great events bring small ones in their train, somewhat after the fashion of princes, who are accompanied by many men of humbler degree; and so poor Naldo's life was shaped by facts of which we read in books of modern history. But I hardly know why I talk of "great" and "small;" things are only that which they are in the sight of God, and in God's sight Naldo and his father and mother were very great indeed, since they were humble and pure of heart, and their joys and sorrows were objects of deeper interest to the Sacred Heart of Jesus than the disputes of statesmen or the ambition of princes. And so, when the Pope was no longer king, Naldo's father, like many another poor man, was cruelly taxed, and the golden maize became less plentiful in the cottage, and the purple grapes had to be sold for very little. And then came a day saddest of all.

When it was mid-winter, and it was cold even at San Stefano, Naldo's father fell sick, and not long after he was laid to rest in the little churchyard, the soft white snow making his coverlet. Poor Naldo! he was very, very sorrowful, yet no child knows to the full, what it loses when its father dies; this it can only learn as the years go on.

But our boy was only a little fellow after all; and with the spring there came once more the sweet flowers and the song of birds, and the world looked so bright and joyous—and had not his father gone to a yet fairer, happier world, called there by God Himself? and were not the saints and angels taking care of him at this moment? And so Naldo laughed and played as in other springtimes, and ate the yellow maize, which had grown so much less plentiful, with the keen appetite of former days.

The leaves had not yet begun to turn, or the sun to be less warm, when Naldo one day began to day-dream as he lay in the shadow of a large beech tree. He had forgotten about other lands and the wonders contained in the great round world when he had seen his father sick and his mother weeping; but now he thought of all these things once more, and the old longing arose within him to see the marvels of which the stranger had spoken.

"O," he said at length, aloud, "if I were only quite big I could travel and——"

"And why should you not travel, though you are not quite big," said a voice close to his elbow; and looking up with a start, Naldo beheld a man he had never seen before. He was not at all like that other stranger I mentioned, for that one was a foreigner, whereas this man was dressed in peasant fashion, only somewhat gaudily, and spoke Italian just like Naldo. He looked about fifty, for his hair was rather grey, his eyes were small and bright, and about his lips there was a constant smile. He carried with him a barrel-organ, upon which was a monkey dressed in a red coat.

"O what a nice little beast!" cried Naldo, who was fond of animals. "But, sir," he said, turning to the stranger, "I do not know who you are, and you do not know me, else you would not ask why I cannot see the world. I am only ten, and there is no one to take care of mother but me!"

Naldo, curiously enough, had never seen a barrel organ or a monkey in his life. San Stefano was a very small village and rather out of the beaten track; I fancy it was this made the stranger think of going there. The fact is he wanted two things: he wanted to make a few pence by grinding his organ, and this he was more likely to do in a village, where such things were unknown; and he wanted to find a pretty looking boy to accompany him on his journeys, and this, too, he was more likely to find in an out-of-the-way village, for in the towns people know by this time that the life of an organ-grinder is not always a happy one.

“Father is in Heaven, and mother could not spare me,” Naldo continued meditatively.

I cannot help thinking the stranger’s small eyes looked more than usually bright when he heard the words “father is in Heaven.”

“If thy father is dead, my boy, there is nothing to keep thee at home; ’tis not difficult for a lad to obtain his mother’s consent to what he wishes. And wouldst thou not like to earn money and send it back to her? I thought as much. Now listen to me. My name is Antonio, and inside this box there is beautiful music. I go through the world letting fine ladies and gentlemen hear the music and see the monkey doing strange tricks. Listen to this,” and Antonio proceeded to turn the handle of his organ, which gave forth the strains of *Adeste Fideles*.

“O, how beautiful!” cried Naldo in delight, “and how clever you must be, sir.”

Antonio was not too great a man to enjoy praise when well merited.

“Well,” he said, “ladies and gentlemen when they hear the beautiful music give me money, as is but just, and the poor people give me their pence, which I am not above taking, for pence in the end mount up into pounds. For example, put a penny into the monkey’s hand, and he will at once show thee his tricks.”

“I haven’t got a penny,” said poor Naldo in confusion.

But Antonio did not seem to mind, and most obligingly made the monkey go through his performance, to Naldo’s very great delight.

And so by the time Antonio went into the village to play to the people and show off his monkey, Naldo had settled with him that, if Brigida gave her consent, he would be his little travelling companion, and go to other lands far distant and beautiful; and then at the end of a year come back to San Stefano with several gold pieces in his pocket sufficient to buy bread for many a long day.

It was all very delightful. Naldo was to have a little instrument and carry white mice about with him, small gentle creatures who would soon get to know so kind a master as Naldo. Brigida was at first much opposed to this plan. How could she spare her Naldo for a whole year—her pretty boy, who had never been any trouble and nothing but a delight to her, and now that his father was dead, seemed almost necessary in her loneliness.

“But, mother dear,” Naldo would urge, “’tis only for a year, and think of all the beautiful things I shall see, and I may die before I have seen them if you do not let me go now. Then, too, mother, there will be more for you to eat if I am gone, and I shall bring back money for you, and if I like the life I will buy an organ of my own and travel—but always come back to you and the Madonna of San Stefano.”

Poor Brigida! she would not have cared how little there had been to eat for her, but the grapes had done badly this season, and food was likely to be scarce; there might not be enough for her Naldo. Then the boy was so anxious to go, and Antonio promised to be very good to him, and indeed, how could anyone help being good to the pretty gentle child?

And so, sorely against her will, Brigida gave her leave. God has rewarded her for her unselfish heroism long ago; only He knew what living without Naldo meant to her. It was settled that Antonio was to come back to San Stefano in a little while to fetch Naldo, bringing the white mice with him and a new suit of clothes, and he was to give Brigida two whole pounds to help to carry her through the winter.

Meanwhile Naldo was to make his First Communion. Alas, all lands were not Christian; and the mother's heart shrank from sending her little one into the great wide world, which she heard was very wicked, without strengthening the young soul with the strength of God Himself. O foolish little birds, why are you so eager to leave your nest where you are sheltered from the rains and the storms and watched over with loving care? O still more foolish little children, why are you so eager to leave home, so eager to see the world? You will find no such friend anywhere as a good mother. Your home is something so sweet and sacred that it is an image of your Father's House in Heaven. The world is cruel and mean and wicked—not the beautiful world of earth, sea, and sky, made by the good God—but the world of sinful men and women, that world which put Jesus Christ to death.

Naldo knew nothing of all this, he only felt so glad at the thoughts of his new life; yet the evening before he left San Stefano a feeling of sorrow stole over him for the first time. He went out on to the hilltop and looked down into the quiet valley. The sun was setting all crimson and golden, and a tree here and there seemed to have caught some of the tints in the sky—perhaps that is the reason why the leaves are so beautiful in autumn. In the spring they are green, the colour of this dear earth; but in autumn, when their youth is ended and their death is at hand they put on the colours of the heavens, they seem to belong more to the sky than to this work-a-day world. Low down was the church, the sun seemed to be kissing the cross on its tower ere going away for the night. How glad the sun must be to kiss the holy cross instead of some pagan image, or the statue of a wicked man called great by the world.

Then half way up the hill was Brigida's cottage, the blue smoke softly curling upwards from the chimney. No doubt, his mother was cooking the best provisions she could afford for his journey of the morrow. Poor Naldo for the first time realized what leaving home meant, and his heart began to grow heavy, but he brushed away his tears, and by the time he had run down to the cottage door, his sorrow was at an end!

After supper, Brigida and her boy went to the church, and kneeling side by side and hand in hand before the Madonna, they each prayed for the same thing, but in a different way. "Make me good and brave, and send me safe home when my travels are over," prayed Naldo. "Keep my boy innocent and pure of heart while he is away, and then let him come to his mother who loves him," prayed Brigida. And the Queen of Heaven heard and answered their prayers.

II.

It is Christmas Eve in a large town in the north of Germany. What a pleasant excitement seems to be over all the place! Men are hurrying to and fro, bent on pleasure rather than on business, or rather, their business to-day is their pleasure, and their pleasure is such an innocent one it makes even quite

prosaic fat old gentlemen thoroughly agreeable to look at. Surely you need not ask what their business is—or rather, if you knew much of German towns and German fathers, you would not need to ask. They are all bent on making provision for the Christmas-tree, a delight to which all but the very poorest children in X—are alike entitled. There are articles in the shops to suit all purses. Why, I saw a man just now whose coat was quite a shabby one, with a small parcel he was carrying very carefully, and as the teller of a story is a privileged person, I peeped into it, and it was full of nuts and apples, and gingerbreads, representing knights on horseback, “Old Father Christmas,” rabbits, hares and other animals.

“The children will be pleased; wee Lottie shall have a horseman all to herself,” I heard him say as he went along; and I thought his homely face looked almost beautiful for a moment, and I wondered why, till he added, “and I can do without much dinner myself,” and then I wondered no longer, for unselfishness always makes people beautiful.

“See, see, papa!” cried a little girl, who was going into one of the finest shops with her father. “O, do stop a moment, there is such a nice boy here with dear little white mice.”

The little girl had a sweet rosy face, and golden hair, of which, however, you could not see much, for she was muffled up in a fur hood and pelisse, a snug, warm dress for such a bitter afternoon.

“Yes, yes,” said the gentleman, absently, “come in, Nina, and choose your own cake and sweetmeats; we are late as it is.”

But the little girl was obstinate.

“You are not kind to-day papa,” she said half-crying, “he is such a very poor little boy, and he looks, O so cold and hungry. Do call him in, and let me give him my cake.”

People were jostling one another near the door, for that street was one of the most crowded, and the gentleman had some difficulty in finding the boy; but he would not disappoint Nina, and in a minute or two he found him.

“Why, he is an Italian,” the gentleman said to himself, as he led him to the shop-door, “poor little fellow, how cold he must be, and what a pretty boy he is, with his dark eyes and curly hair.”

“Papa, now give him some money, please,” said the golden-haired girl. “I have given him a cake, but he says something I cannot understand, he speaks such a queer language; but I think he wants money.”

“Why do you want money, my boy?” said the gentleman in Italian.

The child looked up with a bright flush on his pale face.

“Ah, it is so good to hear it again!” he exclaimed, as he fed his mice with a portion of the cake. “I have not made a penny to-day, for the people are so busy, and if I do not take five florins back to Antonio this evening, he will beat me.”

Naldo—for it was he—did not notice that as he spoke a face with small bright eyes and smiling lips was peering in at the shop door.

“I am speaking the truth,” the child said simply, but with a certain dignity of manner, looking at the gentleman fearlessly.

"I am sure you are," he answered heartily, "but who is Antonio?—stay, though, I am too busy to hear about him now—come to my house to-morrow; here are the five florins."

"O, God reward you, sir," cried the child, but the gentleman and his little daughter were gone. He was a kind gentleman; but what a pity he had not made time to be just a little bit kinder still—alas! he had forgotten to tell Naldo where his house was.

Naldo and his mice having finished their meal, he was proceeding to leave the shop, when a man siezed him roughly by the arm.

"You are a thief," he cried angrily: "why, here was a whole plateful of gingerbread near the door and it has all gone within these five minutes. You shall pay me for it or go to prison."

Naldo could not speak German intelligibly, but he understood what was being said to him.

"I did not steal it," he said, growing very white; "O, sir, do not make me pay for what indeed I did not take; I have only five florins, and if I do not carry it all back to Antonio he will beat me so dreadfully."

The man could not understand what the child was saying, but luckily a woman came to his rescue.

"Bless me," she said, "after all, gingerbread was made to be eaten I suppose! Let the poor little fellow go, he looks forlorn enough—only, hark you, don't you come thieving here any more."

Naldo left the shop white and dry-eyed. He felt too miserable to cry just yet; he heeded nothing around him, neither the bright lights, for the day was closing in, and the shops looked gayer than ever now that the gas was lit, nor the throng of men and the hum of many voices; on he went, still and silent as a ghost. At length he reached a quiet street where the houses looked poor and gloomy and where no shops enticed the Christmas buyer. Naldo was making his way towards the dingiest of these houses, but ere he had reached the door a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and turning round the boy saw Antonio's face, dark and threatening, yet ever with that evil smile about his lips.

"What is it, 'Tonio?" cried Naldo fearfully; "I have got five florins, let me go in now and rest—I am very cold and tired."

"O, you are—are you?" said Antonio, still smiling, "and so you go into grand shops with fine gentlemen and eat cake fit for a prince, do you; and then you tell first the gentleman, then the shopman, that 'Tonio beats you. I've half a mind to kill you in good earnest this time, but I can pay you off some other day. Now give me the five florins, and since they are so easily made on Christmas Eve go back into the gay streets and beg or steal another five."

"'Tonio," cried the boy, "you are wicked as well as cruel. It is beginning to snow and it is late; I cannot beg another florin, I am sure, no one cares to see the poor little white mice to-day, and I will not steal."

"As you please," replied Antonio doggedly, "be as particular as you like in your way of making money, only it must be made before you come home," and so saying he pulled from his pocket a piece of gingerbread, which he began to eat with relish.

"O, you wicked man!" Naldo exclaimed, his dark eyes ablaze, "it is you who stole the gingerbread and let me be taken for the thief. I hate you! I hate you! I will starve—I will die, but I will never, never more come back to you. The Madonna will take care of me; she will be glad that I should

leave such a wicked man as you. You have been cruel and unjust to me all these months, and now you are a thief!—O, how I do hate you!”

All Naldo’s fear was gone; his southern blood was up, and he spoke in a voice that made Antonio a little uncomfortable for the moment.

“As you please,” he then said, scowling: “I will pay you out for this day’s work some other time. Meanwhile, be off to the shops, and don’t dare show your face again without the money.”

“You will never see me any more, Antonio,” said Naldo, as he rushed away into the darkness.

For a moment Antonio stood irresolute. Should he run after the child? After all it was a bitter evening, and it was late now to make up five florins, and Naldo had looked so strange and desperate. Could he be going to do himself a mischief?

“Bah!” said Antonio, as he groped his way upstairs and proceeded to light a good fire, “if the brat does not make the money in a hour or so he will come back without it, as he has often done before; and, perhaps, for once, I’ll not beat him; for after all, he makes a good deal of money for me. Why, I’ve made only a few pence by my organ to-day.”

Meanwhile, whither had Naldo gone? He did not know himself. On he ran, avoiding the bright streets, whose mirth and gladness seemed a mockery to his woe. On he ran, till he came to a part of the town where the houses stood farther apart, and had gardens round them, and then, at last, out of breath and trembling, he sank down in the darkness near a gateway, and burying his face in his hands, wept long, and bitterly. His thoughts travelled back, O so swiftly and longingly to peaceful San Stefano, and to his mother’s cottage, where she— dear, good, sweet mother, was thinking of him and praying for her boy—little dreaming that her darling was crouching in bitter anguish in the snow and darkness. And he thought of his father’s grave. Perchance the snow was falling on it, too; but what was making a warm white shroud over the green mound was cruel and cold as it fell upon him. Yet, was his father really in that mound? O no—a thousand times no! His father was in the land of sunshine and peace, where God Himself had wiped away all tears from his eyes; in that land, holy and happy, “where the wicked cease from troubling. and the weary are at rest.” Much of this Naldo, as a Catholic, knew, and a great longing arose within him, Mother’s home was far, far away—unattainably far it seemed to the tired child; but father’s home, so bright and beautiful, was not far off, for it was with God, and God is everywhere.

“Oh, father, dear father,” Naldo cried aloud, “ask that I may come to you; O call me to you quickly.”

Naldo remembered that his father’s home was in the blessed land over which the Madonna is Queen—the great Queen he had loved so well all his little life—but the child felt so forlorn, it seemed to him perhaps his Mother Mary had forgotten him after all. She was so great, what could it matter to her whether he were sorrowful or glad? Was he fit to go to Heaven? He suddenly recollected the words he had spoken to Antonio. He had said “I hate you;” those were wicked words for a Christian to use, and seemed doubly wrong on this day, which was fast drawing nigh to the hour in which the sweet Jesus, Who was meek and humble of heart, came into our midst to teach us to forgive and love our enemies. Then was it right to say “I will starve, I will die, I will not return to you?”

Poor Naldo gave a little gasp. It was hard work to forgive Tonio.

“Yes, I do forgive him, for the love of Jesus,” he said softly.

He got up, meaning to return to Antonio and bear the brunt of his anger as best he might. But when he got up, a curious feeling came over him—he was all numbed and stiff with cold; the snow was falling fast, yet he was so tired he felt he must go to sleep a little bit first, before going back to 'Tonio's. So he sank back on the snow, letting his weary eyes close. How long he slept I do not know, but when he did wake it was with a strange dizziness in his head, and it seemed to him then that he saw strange figures flitting by like those he had seen in the shop windows during the day, only that those were toys of people in picture frames; whereas these, though long and shadowy, were the figures of real men. There were knights in shining armour, and courtiers bravely tricked out in velvet and satin, and many others whom Naldo could only see by the dim glimmer of a distant gaslight. They all passed the child without any notice, and he for his part felt no inclination to speak to them; he read nothing like pity on the faces of any of these proud lords and soldiers. So Naldo's eyes closed once more, and he slept the dreamless sleep of childhood. The tolling of a distant church bell striking eleven again awoke him. And now he saw only two figures instead of the strange host that had swept past him so proudly before. One figure was that of old Father Christmas hastening towards the house at whose gates Naldo was lying—kind old Father Christmas, who always brings mirth and plenty with him to good boys and girls. As usual, he was not empty-handed, but was bearing with him those things in which all children delight.

“O Father Christmas!” cried Naldo, “why do you pass only me by? Can you not take me into that warm house with you, and be good to me as you are to these little German boys and girls? I have been trying so hard to be good.”

But Father Christmas heeded him not, and walked on smiling.

Then Naldo glanced at his companion. It seemed to the child that it was a figure fair and angelic that floated beside him, some gentle spirit from the next world who also was going to bring his gifts to good children, gifts of kindness to one another, of charity to their poorer fellow-children, of love and gratitude to the Infant Jesus.

“O dear angel! won't you be kind to me?” Naldo cried, and it seemed to him that the angel smiled, and that soft and low came the words:

“Be patient, little one, your Christmas joy is soon to come.”

But as Naldo stretched out his cold numbed hands to stay the beauteous angel, he was gone. And weary and heart-sick he sank back into the snow and into a deep sleep, the snow falling softly all the while.

An hour had sped away, and the church clocks were striking twelve when Naldo opened his eyes, and awoke to real consciousness this time. What was it he saw? O, happy, happy Naldo! His Mother, his own Mother, not his earthly mother, but his Lady, his Queen, she whom he had fancied forgetful of him, because she was so great. Yet now he saw that she was greater than he had dreamed, or could ever have imagined, and his heart beat fast with awe and rapture. O how glad Naldo was then that he had always loved her; and if he could have been sorry, he would have been so sorry that he had not loved her even more; but he could not be sorry, that seemed a thing of the past when he looked into the face of the “Cause of our Joy.”

“Naldo, I have come to take you home with me. My Son Jesus is calling you, and you will live with Him and with me for ever and ever. No more sorrow, no more crying, no more cold or hunger, but

happiness so great that no tongue can speak it; Naldo, shall I show you the Child Jesus? the sight of Him will make you die of gladness.”

“O Mother, Mother! show Him to me!”

The heavenly Queen opened her mantle, and then upon the midnight air there rang out a cry, sweet and wonderful, the cry of exceeding great joy which God grant you and I may utter, too, when, in our “flesh we shall see God.”

It is Christmas morning. The sun is shining brightly on the white snow, the bells are ringing so merrily and sweetly; children with glad faces greet one another with “a merry Christmas;” all is very gay: yet the sun is looking down on a boy who is kneeling in the deep snow, his upturned face white and lifeless, with tears frozen on his cheeks, and about the little form some white mice are creeping softly, as though half wondering why the small brown fingers do not unclasp to give them the usual caress! It was thus Naldo was found, and kind men bore him sorrowfully into the house at whose gates he had died. “Poor child,” they said, “how he must have suffered!” And so he had; yet they little suspected that those tears on the wan face were tears of joy shed by Naldo on his entrance into that world where, as he had dreamed in former days, he indeed was seeing things great and wonderful, and his dear Queen and Mother more beautiful than all else save her Son Our Lord.

And so everyone pitied the sweet-faced child, and as for Nina, her father never dared tell her that it was at the very gates of her home the little fellow died. Even without this knowledge Nina was very heartbroken, and could take comfort for awhile in nothing, save the thought that Naldo would have been pleased that she was kind to his mice. And yet which child, think you, had the happiest Christmas, Nina or Naldo?—I know that Nina was enjoying all the pleasures health and riches and human love can give, while Naldo was lying in the snow and darkness, dying houseless, friendless, and alone, but still I think every Catholic child will agree with me that Naldo’s was the happiest Christmas?

And now you will say, “Why tell us such a sad tale? is not Christmas the happiest and brightest season of the year; why try to make us sorry?”

In the first place, I do not think it such a very sad tale. We know that there is much, very much, poverty and distress in the world; it is no good forgetting about it, that is the last way to mend matters. But since so much sorrow exists, is it not a happy thought that the more anyone is abandoned by his fellow-creatures the more he is entitled to the loving kindness of Almighty God? Do you think Naldo would have changed places with Nina as soon as he saw Our Lady?

In the second place, I have told you this story because I want to make you good to your fellow-children who are poorer than yourselves. There are many many Naldos in the world. They may not all be so good or so pretty and engaging, but that matters not; the Child Jesus loves them, that is enough for you. And if they are not so good as Naldo, that is the more reason to help them. If you do not come across Italian children it matters not; the poor children in your town or village will do quite as well. Give them something from your abundance, deprive yourself of some little indulgence for the love of Jesus, Who was once a little Child. Give a trifle, however small, to some kind priest or nun devoted to the service of the little ones of Christ. If you do this, you will spend a more truly happy Christmas than if you could have every toy and picture-book in the whole world. You will have something of the joy of Naldo’s Christmas; for you will have drawn nearer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

