

WHAT MARY SAW

MARY'S going to town was always an event. In the first place it generally meant some delightful occasion in prospect. But if only a shopping expedition, it was still exciting. There was so much to talk over beforehand; every one was sure to have a commission, and there were so many discussions about each one. This morning she was going on her father's early train. There had been a long talk with mother the night before; every child had had a visit from her at bedtime; there was a long list in her pocketbook, with just enough money for the *must-bes*, and one little secret sum, beside, of Mary's own.

But why Mary went to town that day and how she did the things she went to do are none of our concern. What we are to hear about is the unexpected thing she saw. It was a few minutes before nine, and she had just come from the store where her first purchases had been made. Across the way stood a great church, one that Mary had often noticed but never entered, though there was a board upon it calling the busy passers-by to come apart and rest awhile. Mary was not tired, she did not want to rest; she had never thought before of going into a church, except at service time. What made her walk across the street to-day and open the outer door and enter in? Who knows?

She stepped forward and took her place just within the inner door. Others were standing there beside her, for the church was full—she had never seen a church so full. Every seat was taken. There were benches against the walls; wherever an extra chair could be put, a chair was set. But all were standing, and Mary saw at once that all the great congregation were women. In the far-off chancel she

could dimly see one or two Bishops and other clergymen, but the choir was of women, and they were singing, and so were all the congregation, and the only men among them were the men who were passing down the aisles, with the almsbasins in their hands. Mary's eyes were fixed on these. She saw them passed along the standing rows and come back to the aisles with growing piles of envelopes and bills. She saw the eager faces watching and the eager hands outstretched to give, and through it all she heard the sweet refrain:

"Holy offerings, rich and rare,
Offerings of praise and prayer,
Purer life and purpose high,
Claspèd hands, uplifted eye,
Lowly acts of adoration
To the God of our salvation;
On His altar laid, we leave them:
Christ, present them! God, receive them!"

Mary had seldom heard the hymn, but her neighbor in the aisle handed her the order of service, and her quick ear caught the tune, and her fresh voice rang out with the rest:

"Homage of each humble heart,
Ere we from Thy house depart;
Worship fervent, deep and high,
Adoration, ecstasy;
All that childlike love can render,
Of devotion, true and tender;
On Thine altar laid, we leave them:
Christ, present them! God, receive them!"

What did it all mean? "How beautiful it all is!" thought Mary, and her heart beat, and the color rose in her cheeks, and the light deepened in her eyes. And meanwhile the men in the aisle were drawing nearer, bringing the almsbasins, piled ever higher and higher. Mary's eyes were on them, and a question came into her mind and asked itself again and again, "Shall I be the only one without a gift?" The men were very near, soon they would reach her and pass on. They would take all that treasure and offer it to God, and she have no part in it, unless she

made haste. Mary took out her purse and from it that extra sum, the bit she had put in that morning for a surprise gift, a gift of love for mother dear. "I will tell her all about it. She will understand. We will give it together in this wonderful, mysterious offering."

And so, among all the bills and the envelopes that hid so many checks, Mary dropped her silver coin of love and sacrifice. The men carried back the heaped up treasure. Far away Mary could see the Bishop before the Altar, raising a great basin of gold, gleaming in the sunshine, and heard the words, now subdued by holy awe, now swelling in adoring joy:

"To the Father, and the Son,
And the Spirit, three in One,
Though our mortal weakness raise
Offerings of imperfect praise,
Yet with hearts bowed down most lowly,
Crying, Holy! Holy! Holy!
On Thine altar laid, we leave them:
Christ, present them! God, receive them!"

In the prayer that followed Mary made up her mind. She could not go away until that beautiful service was over. She would make good the time by staying longer; she would do all she had come in town to do; she would take back all they had expected of her; but, besides, she would gain this great thing, and it would be more than anything else for her mother and them all.

So for an hour longer she stayed, bound by such a spell of worshipping love as she had never felt before; absorbed in the sacred words, gaining by quick degrees that preparation of the soul that drew her among the very last to kneel before the Altar, presenting herself, renewing her allegiance, sharing again in the one great Offering, rendering thanks again for all it meant. And as she knelt there seemed to come to her heart the answer to the question that had been in the background of her mind even since she stepped inside the church, "What mean ye by this service?"

For the first time in her life she felt herself to be one of a great Body, and the force of the united prayer and praise of all its members. Her thoughts flew beyond the limits of the dear home family, of the home parish, also dear, beyond that crowded church, to all Christian people, in town and country, throughout the world; and then—what was it that made her think that in this world there are people yet who do not know of Christ, who have never had that sense of glorious nearness which she was feeling then? For the first time in her life Mary prayed a loving, earnest prayer for all of these.

The service was over. With hundreds of others Mary passed down the aisle and out into the street. How strange it seemed! How different everything from that short hour before! Mary shut that hour up in the treasure box of her memory, and went to and fro on her errands till all were done, and then, laden with bundles, took her train for home. The train was full, and at the last moment a young woman hurried in and took the seat beside her, and as she looked at Mary, said in a pleased and friendly voice, "Why, met again!" It was her neighbor of the morning, who had handed her in church the paper with the hymns.

A moment before Mary had been thinking she would shut her eyes and in her trip from town go over every minute of that wonderful time; now she turned eagerly and said, "Tell me all about it. What did it mean?"

"Don't you *know*?" cried the other. "Where do you *live*?"

"Twelve miles out," said Mary.

"*And I have come from China,*" said the other, "and I've been counting on it, and looking forward to it these three years past."

"*Tell me,*" said Mary.

And so she told her. "It is our Thank Offering. It is what we all give, after our