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Little Dot Series. ———————————————

GRATEFUL PETER'S

NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

BY

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THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY:
56, PATERNOSTER ROW; 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD;
AND 164, PICCADILLY.

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GRATEFUL PETER'S

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CHAPTER I.

An Unexpected Present.

What a night it was! That piercing wind laid hold of all the passengers. Some it drove onwards, nearly lifting them off their feet; others it forced backwards, making them fight for every inch of the way through the snow which it flung in their faces.

Umbrellas were of no use that night. Those who tried to use the frail shelters of silk or alpaca saw them turned into playthings by that unruly pitiless wind. Glad were they to furl them tightly again, though in many cases they only managed to carry home a battered bundle of broken ribs and silk. Nobody that could help it would be out of doors at all.

"I wish I weren't forced to be out," thought a little fellow called Peter Grant, as, tired with battling against the wind, he leaned against some railings to regain breath. "And it's little use stopping out. I've only taken three coppers to-night. Who'd stay to buy baked taters in this

snow and wind? I've shouted myself hoarse, and nobody stops to listen. If plenty of folks were out, the wind wouldn't let them hear me."

Peter Grant was twelve years old, and a baked-potato merchant. He had a home—if that poor cellar in Number Three Court, Back Potter Street, could be called one—and he possessed what all great and rich people do not—a true friend. While Peter is leaning against the railings, I will tell you his story, so far as he can remember it.

Peter Grant was only a trotting thing of four years old when he lost his father, and from the neat little home they had been accustomed to, he and his mother were obliged to remove to one room in the court I have mentioned. Peter's mother went out washing and working; but a day came when she returned earlier than usual because she was too ill to finish her work.

Old Sally Graham, who lived in the cellar, used to take care of Peter during his mother's absence. She loved the little fellow dearly, and was Mrs. Grant's faithful nurse until, after a fortnight's illness, Peter was left motherless too. There was a talk of taking Peter to the workhouse, but his tears and Old Sally's pleadings induced the parish officers to give her a little weekly sum. So he stayed on with the only friend who loved him and could talk to him of his mother.

Perhaps it would have been better for Peter if he had been taken to the workhouse. There he would have had good plain schooling, and have been put to some regular trade. As it was, he grew up very ignorant.

Being a sharp lad, and eager to learn, he had somehow got to read pretty well, partly taught by other lads, partly by old Sally. He knew just so much of figures as a boy who sells small articles in the streets

and goes on errands must obtain by every-day practice. Sally was too ignorant to teach Peter more than this.

As to God, religion, the Bible, church, or Sunday-school, neither she nor the boy ever looked on these things as concerning them at all. To be sure, Peter heard the bells calling people to the house of God on Sundays. And sometimes, when tempted out of Number Three Court into the wider streets, where on other days, he cried "Baked taters," he could see well-dressed folk going into the churches and chapels. But he only looked wonderingly at their nice clothes, and never thought of taking part himself.

Sunday! What was Sunday to Peter? I'll tell you, children. It was the day on which Peter had a clean shirt, and on which he often went without a jacket while Sally mended it, and he played at marbles out in the court with other lads. Sunday! Well, there was a little difference between it and other days. They had a bit of warm meat for dinner when they could, and Peter did not go out selling.

At one time, Peter plied his trade on Sundays the same as on other days. But on a particular Sunday evening in early autumn, as he was shouting to the passers-by to purchase "rosy apples three a penny," a gentleman said something to him which stopped his Sunday trading. Peter always remembered that gentleman's face. It was kind, though grave, and his hair was white, but his eyes were bright and his cheeks ruddy. Peter had pushed his hand full of apples in front of the gentleman, and, in his bold way, asked him to buy.

"No, my boy; I do not buy, and you should not sell, on Sundays," was the answer. "Do you not know this is God's day?"

Peter stared open-mouthed, and the gentleman went on speaking. "I

was once a poor boy, and I believe I should be a poor man now if I had not been content to work on six days, and give the seventh part of my time to God. You have a ragged jacket. Do you expect to buy a good coat out of money earned on Sundays?"

Peter looked ruefully at his ragged jacket as the gentleman named it. He had been long vainly trying for a new one.

"I didn't know, sir," he stammered out; "I'm an honest lad, sir. I work hard for my living, and other lads and men too work o' Sundays as well as me."

"Did you not know it was wrong to sell and tempt people to buy on Sundays? If other people do wrong that does not make you right. You may be honest to your fellow-creatures, but you are robbing God of the day that belongs to Him. Do you go to school?"

"Can't afford it, sir."

"What is your father?"

"Haven't got one, sir; nor mother neither. I live with old Sally Graham, and she's a very good friend, sir. She always says I must never steal nor tell lies, nor do anything to get took up by the police."

This was about the sum of Sally's moral teachings.

Poor Sally! She could not tell him of the loving Father in heaven, who has said He is "a Father of the fatherless." Neither had Peter ever heard of that dear Saviour who held out His tender arms for the children whom Jewish mothers brought to seek His blessing. Sally could not repeat the sweet invitation, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not," or tell him that he too might go

to the same dear Saviour, and be sure of a welcome.

The gentleman seemed to understand Peter's position from these answers of his. He was one who had been raised from poverty to a high and honourable position, and he delighted to help others.

So he thought, "I will do something for this lad. Poor, ignorant, fatherless, motherless, living without hope and without God in the world, where could I find a better object to work on?"

Turning to Peter, he said, "Where do you live, my boy?"

"At Number Three Court, Back Potter Street—end house, sir, right-hand side."

"And what is your name?"

"Peter Grant; and I live with Sally Graham."

The white-haired gentleman wrote down Peter's name and address on a slip of paper, which he put into his purse for safety, and then said, "Do you think you would make sixpence more by selling apples to-night?"

"Oh dear no, sir; maybe twopence or threepence at most."

"Then take this sixpence. Go home, and try to remember this is God's day."

"Yes, sir," said Peter.

"I shall keep this paper, and you will most likely see me again."

"Thank you, sir," said Peter, and he touched his cap as the gentleman, with a kind good-night, turned away.

Peter at once started homeward, resolved that this unexpected

windfall should buy an extra good cup of tea and a quarter of lump sugar for old Sally.

Poor and ignorant as Peter was, he was a truly loving grateful lad. He was not able to do much in return for his friend's kindness, but he did what he could.

Is it so with you, dear child-readers? Are you grateful to the parents who load you with so many marks of tenderness? Do you give them ready, joyful obedience, or deny yourselves for their sakes? And when you keep Christmas, feasting on good things, or delighting in your pretty gifts, while you watch the blazing lights on the Christmas-tree, decked by loving hands, what is your chief thought? Do you think of the gifts, or the Chief Giver? Of the pretty presents, or of Him who gave His dear Son that you, believing in Him, might have pardon and life?

Old Sally was standing at the end of the court when Peter returned home.

"You're home soon, Peter; are you sold out?" she asked.

"No; but a gentleman gave me sixpence, and said I mustn't sell on Sundays. And he wrote my name on a paper, and said I should see him again."

Sally asked many questions, considering that a person who bestowed sixpence without being asked for it, and held out hopes of future favours, was worth inquiring about. Peter told her all that had passed, described his appearance, from his gold-rimmed spectacles down to his quick firm step, and finished by saying, "He told me he was once a poor boy, too."

"That made the gentleman give you sixpence. When folks have known what it is to work for their money, they think about others; they know how hard it is to make ends meet if they keep honest."

"He had the sort of face you say it does you good to look at; and I should like to see him again," said Peter.

"I hope you will, then. But oh, dear me! Gentlefolks often promise things and forget all about 'em. I daresay they mean to keep them, but other things come in the way, and they forget."

"But this gentleman did not look as if he would."

"Maybe not. To my mind, they're much of a muchness, as the saying is. I never saw one I could altogether trust to."

(No, Sally; because the eyes of your understanding have not yet been opened to see Him whose "word is truth," and who, having promised, is ever faithful to perform.)

Peter gave Sally all the money he had taken, but kept back the sixpence. Though short of many things, she did not ask for it, but hoped he would save it towards the price of a new jacket. But he only thought of her comfort. He would have gone then to buy the tea and sugar, but he remembered that if it were not right for him to sell apples on Sunday, neither was it for others to sell tea and sugar.

It was hard work to keep the sixpence, when he saw how few grains of tea were left in the wide-necked bottle which did duty as a caddy. But he did keep it.

On Monday morning, he bought with it an ounce of tea, a quarter of sugar, and a bloater. He had the happiness of seeing his old friend

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