

ERIC BUTTERWORTH PAPERS (3014)

**BOX 18
FOLDER 39**

**THE ULTIMATE GIFT
DECEMBER 19, 1982**

Scrooge

J Dec 29, 1992

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

NEXT SATURDAY IS CHRISTMAS DAY, A TIME CELEBRATED ALL OVER THE CHRIST^{IAN}~~IAN~~ WORLD. AND BECAUSE OUR CULTURE HAS BEEN WIDELY EX~~PORTED~~PORTED ALL OVER THE WORLD, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE...IT WILL BE CHRISTMAS IN OTHER^{NON-CHRISTIAN}COUNTRIES, LIKE JAPAN, TOO.

IT IS OFTEN SAID, CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN. AND...I WOULD~~ADD~~ADD, AND FOR THE SLEEPING CHILD THAT LIES DORMANT~~ED~~ WITHIN US. I LOVE THE PLAINTIVE CALL OF ELIZABETH AKERS ALLEN~~ED~~

'BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD, O TIME/IN YOUR FLIGHT...MAKE ME A CHILD AGAIN, JUST FOR TO-NIGHT.'

UNLESS WE ARE LED BY THE CHILD WITHIN US, THERE IS A TENDENCY TO GET CAUGHT UP IN WHAT PHILIP WYLIE CALLS 'THE HOPPED-UP, PRESSURE-LADEN, STATUS-SEEKING, COMPETITIVE DEGRADATION OF CHRISTMAS...'

AND
~~OF~~ THERE IS MUCH THAT IS BEAUTIFUL^{AND} MAGICAL IN CHRISTMAS IF WE GO WITH ITS FLOW. BUT IF ~~AND~~ ~~WHEN~~ WE BECOME SNAGGED ON THE PRESSURESS AND UTTER OUR OWN KIND OF 'BAH, HUMBUG' - THEN IT IS TIME TO TAKE AN INVENTORY 'WHAT WE ARE KEEPING INSTEAD OF CHRISTMAS.

SCROOGE

FIRST OF ALL IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES. WE HAVEN'T REALLY 'KEPT' CHRISTMAS AS LONG AS WE SIMPLY OBSERVE ~~THE~~ TRADITIONS, FOR MOST OF THEM HAVE BEEN ECLECTICALLY BORROWED FROM OTHER SOURCES, MOSTLY PAGAN. THEY HAVE LITTLE RELEVANCE TO WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT.

TO THE CHILD, OR THE CHILD-LIKE PART OF US - CHRISTMAS IS PURE MAGIC. BUT LIKE ALL MAGIC WE KNOW THERE IS ILLUSION AND SLEIGHT-OF-HAND INVOLVED. FOR THE MISTLETOE AND POSSIBLY THE CHRISTMAS TREE, TOO, ARE QUITE LIKELY PLASTIC ...SYMBOLIZING THE GREAT FACADE OF CHRISTMAS THAT HAS BEEN ERECTED LIKE A HOLLYWOOD SET - TAKEN DOWN FROM ATTICS AND STOREROOMS AND CAREFULLY ASSEMBLED AS WE, QUITE OFTEN, DUTIFULLY AND EVEN SLAVISHLY, GO THROUGH THE ANNUAL CHARADE.

Now...
LET ME BE QUICK TO SAY THAT I BELIEVE IN CHRISTMAS...AND AT THE BUTTERWORTH HOUSE OLGA AND I BECOME THE CHILD AGAIN JUST FOR THE FORTNIGHT. WE HAVE FUN IN ERECTING THE FACADE, AND WE LEAVE THE TREE UP AND GAILY GLOWING THROUGH THE END OF JANUARY. WE LOVE IT. I GUESS THE REASON WE FIND IT EASY AND FUN TO GO THROUGH THE CHARADE EVERY YEAR IS THAT WE ~~KNOW IT IS~~ ^{SEE SYMBOL} ~~IT IS~~ A ~~CHARADE...~~ ~~A GAME WE PLAY.~~ WITH A LOVELY INNERE
SCROOGE

MEANING. AS ANGELA MORGAN SINGS: 'OH, IT ISN'T
THE HOLLY OR ~~THE~~ THE TREE OR THE FIRELIGHT'S GLOW...
IT IS THE FLAME THAT GOES FROM THE HEARTS OF MEN

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE OBSERVANCE OF CHRISTMAS
AS A HOLIDAY WAS NOT ESTABLISHED IN AMERICA
UNTIL THE LAST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY? THE
PILGRIMS NOT ONLY FROWNED ON A SEASON OF 'MAKING
MERRY', BUT IT WAS AGAINST THE LAW. IN 1659 THE
COLONY OF MASS. PASSED A LAW THAT READ:

1 'WHOSOEVER SHALL BE FOUND OBSERVING ANY SUCH
DAY AS CHRISTMAS, OR THE LIKE, EITHER BY
FORBEARING OF LABOR, FEASTING, OR IN ANY
OTHER WAY, SHALL BE FINED 5 SHILLINGS.'

AND FOR MANY YEARS PEOPLE WHO REFUSED TO WORK
ON CHRISTMAS EITHER WENT TO JAIL OR PAID FINES.

AND LOOK AT US NOW!// BUT I DON'T MEAN THAT
DISPARAGINGLY, FOR THERE IS MUCH THAT IS CREATIVE
AND BEAUTIFUL, WITH ALL ITS TRIMMINGS. THE
PROBLEM IS NOT IN KEEPING CHRISTMAS, BUT IN
KEEPING IT SUPERFICIALLY. FOR CHRISTMAS HAS
THREE DIMENSIONS

AT THE SURFACE WE ARE ENGAGED IN THE SYMBOLIC
THAT ALL TOO OFTEN TENDS TO OBSCURE RATHER THAN
REVEAL OTHER DIMENSIONS WITHIN. IF WE ARE
WILLING TO LET IT FLOW, WE CAN THRILL TO THE

SINGING OF CAROLS, THE NOSTALGIA OF STOCKINGS HUNG BY THE CHIMNEY, THE EXCITEMENT OF GIFT-EXCHANGING, THIS YEAR THE STORE WINDOWS ARE ESPECIALLY ENCHANTING, DELIGHTING THE YOUNG AT HEART WITH THE GLITTER OF HOLIDAY MAGIC. ^{HOW} ~~AND~~ ^{GOOD IT IS TO} ~~WE CAN~~ WALK PLACIDLY THROUGH THE CROWDS AND CATCH THE ENERGY OF JOY AND EXPECTANCY... AND WHIMSICALLY VIEW THE BELL-RINGING SALVATION ARMY LASSIES, AND THE VARIED ARRAY OF SANTA CLAUSES WITH THE SUIT THAT DOESN'T QUITE FIT, AND CATCH THE AROMA OF CHESTNUTS BEING WARMED ON A CRUDE STOVE AND HANDLED BY GRIMY HANDS.

I SAY DON'T LISTEN TO THE 'BAH, HUMBUG' COMPLAINERS. IT IS A LOVELY TIME OF YEAR, CALLING OUT THE BEST IN NEARLY EVERYONE, AT LEAST IN THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO BE A CHILD AGAIN JUST FOR TONIGHT.'

OF COURSE THERE IS MUCH MORE INVOLVED. HOW EASILY WE CAN RETURN THE TRIMMINGS AND THE PLASTIC TREE TO THE ATTIC FOR ANOTHER YEAR. HOW QUICKLY THE STORES CAN CHANGE THEIR DISPLAYS TO JANUARY SALES. HOW SOON THE STREET SANTAS RETURN TO THEIR PLACE IN LINE AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION OFFICE. YES, THERE IS SOMETHING MORE

to mention

IT IS THE NATIVITY STORY ITSELF - THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN A MANGER THOSE LONG YEARS AGO.

IT IS AN ASPECT OF CHRISTMAS THAT GOES ~~ALMOST~~ ALMOST UNTOUCHED AND OBSCURED BEHIND THE PLASTIC AND PAPER-MACHE. PERHAPS YOU RECALL THE STORY OF TWO WOMEN PAUSING BEFORE A LOVELY CRECHE DISPLAYED AMONG CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS IN A DEPARTMENT STORE WINDOW. ONE OF THEM REMARKED - 'NOW LOOK AT THAT, WOULDN'T YOU KNOW IT? THE CHURCH IS EVEN TRYING TO TAKE OVER CHRISTMAS.'

THE NATIVITY STORY IS A LOVELY, POIGNANT, BUT RARELY UNDERSTOOD STORY. ACCORDING TO LUKE... JOSEPH AND MARY COME TO BETHLEHEM. HE SAYS CRYPTICALLY, 'WHILE THEY WERE THERE SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRSTBORN SON...AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN.'

IT IS INTERESTING HOW WE TEND TO READ INFERENCES INTO SCRIPTURAL WORDS ACCORDING TO A CONTEMPORARY FRAME OF REFERENCE. FOR INSTANCE THE WORD 'INN', CONJURES UP SOMETHING LIKE AN ENGLISH PUB OR A HIGHWAY HOLIDAY INN MOTEL. - WITH A BAR FILLED WITH LOUD-LAUGHING REVELERS. THE FACT IS THE BIBLICAL TERM 'INN' MEANS A ~~KHAN~~ 'KHAN' WHICH WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A ~~KHAN~~ PROTECTIVE ENCLAVE, WITH FOUR WALLS, NO ROOF. THESE WERE LIKE CARAVAN MOTELS, BUILT AND PLACED

A DAY'S JOURNEY APART ON THE ROADS FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICH⁰, AND TO DAMASCUS. ETC. BY TAKING¹ THEIR DONKEYS AND CAMELS INTO THE KHAN AT NIGHT THEY WERE PROTECTED ~~FROM~~^{FROM} WILD ANIMALS AND THIEVES. BUT MARY AND JOSEPH FOUND REFUGE IN A CAVE NEARBY, OF WHICH THERE WERE MANY, AND PROBABLY LED TO IT BY THE VERY INN-KEEPER WHO HAS ^{BEE}~~N~~ TRADITIONALLY ~~P~~^{ILL}LORIED AS THE SY~~M~~^BMBOL OF THE HARD-HEARTED BUSINESSMAN.

▶ LUKE'S STORY IN PASTORAL SIMPLICITY TELLS OF SHEPHERDS KEEPING WATCH BY NIGHT OVER THEIR SHEEP, AND ~~OF~~ AN ANGEL STANDING BY FILLING THEM WITH FEAR. ~~AND~~ OF ANGEL VOICES TELLING¹ THEM OF THE BIRTH OF A SAVIOUR IN A MANGER. ~~AND~~ OF THEIR DETERMINATION TO GO AND SEE AND WORSHIP.

▶ THE MATTHEW SCENARIO IS COLORED WITH GRANDUR AND REGAL SPLENDOR. IT TELLS OF ~~TH~~THREE WISE MEN, SOMETIMES CALLED THREE KINGS, WHO CAME FROM THE EAST TO JERUSALEM, FOLLOWING A STAR, WHICH WAS PROBABLY AN ASTROLOGICAL SIGN, THAT LED ~~THEM~~ TO THE MANGER, WHERE THEY PRESENTED THE NEW-BORN KING WITH GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANK^{INCENSE}, AND MYRRH.

THIS IS THE STORY, OR STORIES, AS RECALLED A GENERATION LATER, AFTER FREQUENT TELLING AND PERHAPS FREQUENTLY EMBELLISHED, BEFORE WRITING.

WHAT CHILD IS THERE WHO COULD NOT TELL IT. AND YET WHAT ADULT IS THERE WHO UNDERSTANDS IT IN TERMS OF HIS OWN LIFE IN THIS TIME?

BUT HOW BEAUTIFULLY AND MEANINGFULLY IT ALL COMES TOGETHER WHEN WE PERCEIVE ~~THE~~ INNERMEANING OF THE STORY. THIRD DIMENSION *shepherds and wise men became conscious of the Christmas Presence.*

IT IS AN AWARENESS SO IMPORTANT THAT IT HAS SEVERAL HANDHOLDS BY WHICH WE CAN LAY HOLD OF THE STORY, ACCORDING TO OUR CONSCIOUSNESS -- WHETHER IN FAITH AND SIMPLICITY LIKE THE SHEPHERDS...OR IN REASON AND INTELLECT LIKE THE ~~WISE~~ WIS MEN.

★ BUT WHATEVER MAY BE YOUR OWN PERCEPTION OF THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD, ONE THING IS SURE - IT IS THE STORY OF THE GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN. JOHN 3:16 'GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE ~~GAVE~~ HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON...'

HOW THIS HAS BEEN MISREPRESENTED AS SAYING JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY SON! AND THAT ONLY BY BELIEVING ON HIM CAN WE BE SAVED!

BUT, YOU SEE, THE GREAT GIFT, TRULY THE ULTIMATE GIFT, IS GOD INCARNATING HIMSELF IN AND AS MAN. SALVATION COMES BY BELIEVING ON THIS GOD-SELF OR CHRIST-SELF, WITHIN US.

MEISTER ECKHART - 'GOD NEVER BEGOT BUT ONE SON, BUT THE ETERNAL IS FOREVER BEGETTING THE ONLY-BI

* GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT ~~HE~~ HE GAVE YOU. GOD
SO LOVED THAT HE GAVE. GAVE HIMSELF

* WE DO A LOT OF GIVING AT CHRISTMAS. ACTUALLY
IT IS THE HEART OF WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL
ABOUT. I DON'T MEAN THE CONFORMITY-RIDDEN,
OBLIGATION-IMPELLED, STATUS-SEEKING KIND OF
GIVING THAT DRAINS OUR ENERGY AS WELL AS
OUR FUNDS. LIFE IS FOR GIVING, RELEASING
OUR IMPRISONED SPLENDOR.

* WE ARE CALLED TO GIVE ~~RE~~ BIRTH TO THE CHRIST
OF OUR NATURE, SYMBOLIZED BY THE NATIVITY OF
JESUS BORN IN THE MANGER. WE ~~ARE~~ SO ~~E~~ASILY
~~AND~~ SO OFTEN DRIFT INTO A 'GETTING' CONSCIOUSNESS
AND IN THE PURSUIT^{OF} THINGS OF THE WORLD...AND
LIKE THE PRODIGAL SON IN THE FAR COUNTRY OF
MATERIALITY, WE COME TO KNOW WANT. CHRISTMAS
CALLS~~S~~ US TO WAKE UP, TO COME TO OURSELVES, AND
TO GET BACK INTO A GIVING CONSCIOUSNESS -- AND
THIS IS SO BEAUTIFULLY SYMBOLIZED IN CHRISTMAS
GIVING -- OR ~~SHOULD I ADD~~, IT SHOULD BE.

* THE POET SAYS, 'THE GIFT WITHOUT THE GIVER IS
BARE.' WHY? BECAUSE WHEN YOU GIVE SIMPLY THE
INTRINSIC ~~THING~~ THING, IT IS SOMETHING THAT DEPLETES
YOU IN ~~THE~~ GIVING. BUT WHEN YOU GIVE IN THE
SPIRIT OF LOVE AND SERVICE, ~~IT~~ IS GIVING OUT
OF THE OVER-FLOW

☆ BY WHICH THE GIFT CONVEYS SOMETHING FAR TRANSCENDENT TO ITS MATERIAL WORTH. YOU ARE BLESSED IN THE GIVING AND THE OTHER PERSON IS BLESSED IN THE RECEIVING.

HOW OFTEN WE GET CAUGHT UP IN TRYING TO FIND A GIFT FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS EVERYTHING. BUT OF WHAT AVAILABLE TO GIVE THE FINEST GIFT IF YOU CANNOT GIVE THE GIFT OF YOURSELF?

☆ THE ULTIMATE GIFT TO YOU IS GOD'S GIFT OF HIS CREATIVE FLOW IN WHICH YOU ARE THE IMAGE AND MAY BECOME THE LIKENESS OF THE WHOLE BEING OF GOD. WHEN WE REALLY UNDERSTAND THIS PROCESS THEN WE DISCOVER THAT TRUE GIVING IS AT THE SAME TIME A RECEIVING. FOR THE ULTIMATE GIFT IS THAT IN WHICH THERE IS NO STRAIN OR DRAIN, BUT THERE IS ACTUALLY AN INCREASE IN THE GIVING. IT IS ONE OF THE DEEPEST OF THE UNIVERSE'S MYSTICAL SECRETS.

☆ IF I HAD ONE DOLLAR AND YOU HAD ONE DOLLAR, AND IF I GAVE YOU MY DOLLAR AND YOU GAVE ME YOUR DOLLAR, WE WOULD STILL EACH HAVE BUT ONE DOLLAR. BUT IF I HAD AN IDEA AND YOU HAD AN IDEA AND WE EACH GAVE THE OTHER AN IDEA, NOW WE WOULD EACH HAVE TWO IDEAS. THIS IS THE ULTIMATE GIFT.

✱ WHEN YOU CATCH ~~THE~~ IDEA OF GOD'S ULTIMATE GIFT OF THE CHRIST PATTERN ~~LANDS~~ POTENTIAL WITHIN YOU, AND WHEN YOU ~~BEGIN~~ TO SEE THAT YOU ARE THIS ULTIMATE GIFT OF GOD... THEN YOU BEGIN ~~TO~~ UNDERSTAND JESUS' INJUNCTION TO LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE, TO REACH OUT AND ~~LET~~ YOUR LIFE BE AS A PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, AS YOU BECOME WHAT ~~YOU~~ YOU WANT TO SHARE.

ED. GUEST. 'RATHER SEE A SERMON
THAN HEAR ONE ANY DAY

▶ ONE OF THE GREATEST IDEAS THAT HAVE EVER BEEN EXPRESSED : IS ~~THAT~~ THAT THERE IS A PERSON GOD-SIZED WITHIN THE SOUL OF EVERY ONE OF US. PAUL SAID IT: 'CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY.'
AND CHRISTMAS IS A LOVELY SEASON TO EXPERIENCE THIS BIRTH SYMBOLICALLY IN THE NATIVITY STORY, AND TO TRULY GIVE BIRTH TO THE CHRIST CHILD IN YOUR GIVING OF GIFTS AND EXPRESSING OF ~~OF~~ BLESSINGS AND SALUTATIONS -- ALL REVEALING THE ULTIMATE GIFT IN THE PROCESS OF UNFOLDMENT.

✱ THERE ARE MANY BEAUTIFUL STORIES ABOUT CHRISTMAS. I THINK MY ~~FAVOURITE~~ FAVOURITE OF ALL IS FULTON OURSLER'S 'A STRING OF BLUE BEADS.'

PETE RICHARDS WAS THE ~~BARBARIC~~ LONELIEST PERSON IN TOWN ON THE DAY JEAN GRACE OPENED THE DOOR TO HIS SHOP. PETE'S SMALL BUSINESS HAD ~~COME~~ COME DOWN TO HIM FROM HIS GRANDFATHER. THE LITTLE FRONT

WINDOW WAS STREWN WITH A DISARRAY OF OLD-FASHIONED THINGS. BRACELETS AND LOCKETS WORN IN THE DAYS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, GOLD RINGS AND SILVER BOXES, IMAGES OF JADE AND IVORY, PORCELAIN FIGURINES.

ON THIS WINTER'S AFTERNOON A CHILD WAS STANDING THERE, HER FOREHEAD AGAINST THE GLASS, EARNEST AND ENORMOUS EYES STUDYING EACH DISCARDED TREASURE AS IF SHE WERE LOOKING ^{FOR SOMETHING} QUITE SPECIAL. FINALLY, SHE STRAIGHTENED UP WITH A SATISFIED AIR AND ENTERED THE STORE.

BEHIND THE COUNTER STOOD PETE HIMSELF, A MAN NOT MORE THAN 30, BUT WITH HAIR ALREADY TURNING GREY. THERE WAS A BLEAK AIR ABOUT HIM AS HE LOOKED AT THE SMALL CUSTOMER WHO FLATTENED HER UNGLOVED HANDS ON THE COUNTER.

"MISTER," SHE BEGAN, "WOULD YOU PLEASE LET ME LOOK AT THAT STRING OF BLUE BEADS IN THE WINDOW?"

PETE PARTED THE DRAPERIES AND LIFTED OUT THE NECKLACE. THE TURQUOISE STONES GLEANNED BRIGHTLY AGAINST THE PALLOR OF HIS PALM.

"THEY'RE JUST PERFECT" SAID THE CHILD, "WILL YOU WRAP THEM UP PRETTY FOR ME, PLEASE?" PETE STUDIED HER WITH A STONY AIR, "ARE YOU BUYING THESE FOR SOMEONE?"

"THEY'RE FOR MY BIG SISTER...SHE TAKES CARE OF ME. YOU SEE, THIS WILL BE THE FIRST CHRISTMAS SINCE MY MOTHER DIED. I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR THE MOST WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR MY SISTER."

"HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU HAVE?" ASKED PETE WARILY. SHE HAD BEEN BUSILY UNTYING THE KNOT IN A HANDKERCHIEF, AND NOW SHE POURED A HANDFUL OF PENNIES ON THE COUNTER. "I EMPTIED MY BANK", SHE EXPLAINED SIMPLY.

PETE RICHARDS LOOKED AT HER THOUGHTFULLY. THEN HE CAREFULLY DREW BACK THE NECKLACE - THE PRICE TAG WAS VISIBLE TO HIM BUT NOT TO HER. HOW COULD HE TELL HER? BUT THEN...IN A FLASH SOMETHING HAPPENED TO HIM, THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS ENTERED HIS HEART FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY A YEAR, AND HE RECEIVED AND FELT COMPELLED TO GIVE THE ULTIMATE GIFT. SO HE FOUND HIMSELF THINKING 'WHY SHOULD I TELL HER?'

SO HE WRAPPED THE PACKAGE IN SCARLET PAPER AND TIED IT WITH A BOW OF GREEN RIBBON. "THERE YOU ARE...DON'T LOSE IT ON THE WAY HOME."

SHE SMILED HAPPILY AT HIM OVER HER SHOULDER AS SHE RAN OUT THE DOOR. SOMETHING ABOUT JEAN GRACE AND HER STRING OF BEADS HAD STIRRED HIM TO THE DEPTHS OF A GRIEF THAT WOULD NOT STAY BURIED. THE CHILD'S HAIR WAS WHEAT YELLOW,

HER EYES SEA BLUE. PETE HAD BEEN IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WITH HAIR OF THE SAME YELLOW AND WITH EYES JUST AS BLUE. AND THE TURQUOISE NECKLACE WAS TO HAVE BEEN HER~~S~~.

BUT THERE HAD BEEN A RAINY NIGHT -- A TRAGIC ACCIDENT -- AND THE LIFE WAS DRAINED OUT OF HIS DREAM. SINCE THEN PETE RICHARDS HAD LIVED TOO MUCH WITH HIS GRIEF IN SOLITUDE.

BUT IN THAT MOMENT AS JEAN GRACE STOOD BEFORE HIM HOPEFULLY, SOMETHING HAPPENED, PERHAPS A DOOR HAD OPENED, AND A NEW SPIRIT HAD ENTERED IN. --

DURING THE NEXT TEN DAYS BUSINESS WAS BRISK -- AND WHEN THE LAST CUSTOMER HAD GONE, LATE ON CHRISTMAS EVE, HE SIGHED WITH RELIEF, FOR IT WAS OVER FOR ANOTHER YEAR. BUT FOR PETE RICHARDS IT WAS NOT QUIET OVER!

THE DOOR OPENED AND A YOUNG WOMAN HURRIED IN. HE REALIZED THAT SHE LOOKED//FAMILIAR, YET HE COULD NOT REMEMBER WHEN OR WHERE HE HAD SEEN HER BEFORE. HER HAIR WAS A GOLDEN YELLOW AND HER LARGE EYES WERE BLUE. WITHOUT SPEAKING SHE DREW FROM HER PURSE A PACKAGE LOOSELY UNWRAPPED IN ITS RED PAPER AND GREEN RIBBON. PRESENTLY THE STRING OF BLUE BEADS LAY GLEAMING BEFORE HIM.

"DID THESE COME FROM YOUR SHOP?" "YES THEY DID"
"ARE THE STONES REAL?" "YES. NOT THE FINEST
QUALITY, BUT REAL." "CAN YOU REMEMBER WHO IT WAS
YOU SOLD THEM TO?" "SHE WAS A SMALL GIRL. HER
NAME WAS JEAN. SHE BOUGHT THEM FOR HER OLDER
SISTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT." "HOW MUCH ARE THEY
WORTH?" "THE PRICE" HE SAID SOLEMNLY "IS ALWAYS
A CONFIDENTIAL MATTER BETWEEN THE SELLER AND
THE CUSTOMER." "BUT JEAN NEVER HAD MORE THAN
A FEW PENNIES OF SPENDING MONEY. HOW COULD
SHE PAY FOR THEM?"

"SHE PAID THE BIGGEST PRICE ANYONE CAN EVER
PAY, SHE GAVE ALL SHE HAD."

A SILENCE FILLED THE LITTLE CURIO SHOP. IN SOME
FARAWAY STEEPLE, A BELL BEGAN TO RING. THE
SOUND OF THE DISTANT CHIMING, THE LITTLE PACKAGE
LYING ON THE COUNTER, THE QUESTION IN THE EYES
OF THE GIRL...AND THE STRANGEST FEELING OF RENEWAL
STRUGGLING UNREASONABLY IN THE HEART OF THE
MAN, ALL HAD COME TO BE BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF
A CHILD.

"BUT WHY DID YOU DO IT?" HE HELD OUT THE GIFT
IN HIS HAND. "IT'S ALREADY CHRISTMAS MORNING",
HE SAID, "AND IT IS MY MISFORTUNE THAT I HAVE
NO ONE TO GIVE ANYTHING TO. WILL YOU LET ME
SEE YOU HOME AND WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AT THE DOOR?"

AND, SO, TO THE SOUND OF MANY BELLS, AND IN THE MIDST OF HAPPY PEOPLE, PETE RICHARDS AND A GIRL WHOSE NAME HE HAD YET TO LEARN WALKED OUT INTO THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT DAY THAT BRINGS HOPE INTO THE WORLD FOR US ALL. *"A STRING OF BLUE BEANS"*

HENRY VICTOR MORGAN, IN THE CLOSING LINES OF HIS LOVELY POEM... *A MAN GOD-SIZE*

'SO WE WAIT TODAY AND DEEPLY PRAY
IN THE MIDST OF EARTH'S NOISE AND FUSS,
FOR ONE TO ARISE, IN LOVE GOD-SIZE
IN THE HEART OF EACH ONE OF US.'

ONE OF THE GREATEST IDEAS EVER EXPRESSED IS THAT THERE IS A ^{PERSON} ~~MAN~~ GOD-SIZE IN THE HEART OF EVERY ONE OF US., 'CHRIST IN YOU YOUR HOPE...'

THUS THE INNER MEANING OF CHRISTMAS IS THAT THIS CHRIST SELF, THE GOD-PATTERN WITHIN YOU, CAN BE REBORN, REAWAKENED; AND THAT YOU CAN EXPERIENCE THE ULTIMATE GIFT, AND BECOME THE PERSON YOU REALLY DESIRE TO BE. L

'GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE ~~THE~~ THAT OF YOU THAT IS BEGOTTEN ONLY OF HIM.

IT IS THE ULTIMATE GIFT...AND EXPERIENCING IT, YOU WILL REALIZE THE ULTIMATE IN THE FULLEST, RICHEST, AND HAPPIEST CHRISTMAS EVER.