

[L'Humanité]

THE CHILD AND THE TOY

BY FREDÈRIC BOUTET

THE gift which Pierre's godfather sent to him every year arrived as usual between Christmas and the New Year.

It was an immense box, quite wonderfully wrapped up, and bearing the name and address of a famous toy shop. It was addressed to Pierre personally, but the child, though wild with curiosity, knew that it would be useless to ask that it be given to him at once. He must resign himself to wait until his father returned from his office, and was ready to undertake the solemn rite of opening the package.

At six o'clock, his father, a methodical and somewhat cross-grained government clerk, arrived. When he had washed his hands, kicked off his shoes, and put on slippers, he put the great box on the dining room table and calmly began to undo the knots of the cord.

The gift was an aeroplane, a magnificent toy, with large wings, a compressed air motor, and aluminum body. An enclosed note explained the method of making it fly. There was an impressive silence. Pierre stood with his mouth open, drunk with joy.

'It must have cost at least one hundred francs,' said the father.

'It is crazy to spend so much on a *gamin*,' said Pierre's elder sister enviously.

'I have never seen anything so princely,' said Pierre's mother, a large, active woman. She turned to her husband and added, 'You must take care, Leon, when you are tying the package

together again. It will have a magnificent effect.'

Pierre trembled as this enigmatic phrase drew him from his dream of joy. He lifted an anxious little face. His mother put on a grave, easy, and well-meaning air.

'My little Pierre,' said she, 'you are aware of the sacrifices which we are making to bring you up. Now you can make a sacrifice for us. Your father, who has great capacities, occupies a situation quite unworthy of him. M. Paytre, his chief, may try to advance him. Moreover, he invites us to his receptions. We owe him a return. He has a son of your age, Edmond, whom you have seen at the Tuileries. Well, we are going to offer him the present which your godfather has sent. And, after all is said and done, what could you do with it? One cannot fly a toy aeroplane in a fifth-floor apartment, and I never have time to take you out. Your godfather will know nothing about it because he comes to Paris only in the springtime; when he arrives, he will have forgotten all about it. I am sure, my little son, that you are happy to do this for us.'

She paused, waiting for an answer, but if Pierre was happy, he did not say so. His little face grew tense, and suddenly he burst into convulsive sobs.

His father grew angry. 'Ah, now! No scenes! That is all there is to it. Your mother is very good, too good, to explain it to you.'

'He is old enough to understand,' said the mother. 'He must be taught

the necessities of life and his duties toward his parents. I really awaited a disinterested gesture. You hurt me, Pierre. Can it be that you are selfish?’

Pierre continued to sob. His parents exchanged a displeased look. His sister shrugged her shoulders. He could not eat. And because he could not eat, he was sent to bed.

In bed he cried as he had never cried before. His godfather’s gift was the only real gift that he ever received. As he had had the bad luck to be born on the twenty-sixth of December, and his parents were not rich, he was never given anything but useful articles. On New Year’s he was given a cap, or some shirts, or a pair of boots, or, worst of all, some school books or a pencil box. Sometimes an uncle or an aunt would send a hypocritically instructive book such as *The Perfect Little Historian*, or *My Début as a Calculator*, childish compilations full of happy stratagems for luring children into the forest of knowledge. But Pierre never appreciated these jokes.

Pierre’s godfather was a distant cousin who lived in Normandy. Being rich and a bachelor, all the family fought for his good will. He was friendly and generous, but rather sensitive, and when he came to Paris for the yearly Agricultural Show, he was the object of an extraordinary assault of various amiabilities. Pierre’s parents, because of their son’s relation to this rich godfather, considered their claim on him to be the greatest. The Norman was fond enough of his little godson, and every year sent him a very costly toy. Pierre, naturally enough, was not allowed to touch them, for he smashed everything put into his hands, and his mother sagely kept them for wiser years. But as he was a good reasoner, even for a child, he often asked himself why he was considered

destructive when nothing was ever given him which he could break. As for the toys, they were locked in a wardrobe and shown to envious visitors. Their splendor gave him importance and pride. He talked about them to his little comrades.

Now the immense joy of the year was to be taken away from him and put into the hands of another. He might even see it in the other’s hands. So rending was this thought that he almost arose and destroyed the aeroplane. But he did not dare to, and fell into a sleep full of hopeless nightmares. On the following day the aeroplane, carefully packed up again, disappeared, and on the following Sunday at breakfast Pierre’s father received a letter which he opened with an important air. He reddened with pleasure.

‘Here,’ said he to his wife, ‘read this.’ She took the letter and exclaimed, ‘Of course, they were enchanted.’ It was a splendid present. Your promotion—it is exactly as if it had been announced.

The sound of the doorbell cut short the exclamations. In the hall a deep, friendly voice was heard questioning the servant.

‘They are in?’ So much the better.’

Pierre’s mother changed color. ‘It is his godfather,’ she murmured in a shocked voice.

Her husband stood up, livid. ‘Impossible,’ he said. But the Norman was already at the door, his face shining with a friendly smile. For the first time in years he had come in to Paris to spend the holidays with his relatives. Pierre’s mother, however, was not daunted. After the first effusions she bent down to the boy and said imperatively, ‘The aeroplane—say that you broke it.’

She then said aloud, ‘Pierre’s toy. You are too good. Really, you will spoil him. What do you think has

happened? We did not have the courage to take it away from him; he was so happy playing with it. Yes, you do well to cry.'

'Well, what did he do with it?' The godfather, astonished and somewhat defiant, stared at Pierre and waited for the truth. Pierre raised his eyes. He had been enjoying the satisfaction of his righteous rancune; but as he saw the looks of anguish which both his parents turned upon him, and recalled the words of his mother, emotion tore his soul apart. He would show that they could count upon him.

'It is broken. It was n't my fault. Yes, by the window. I wanted to make

it go. It fell into the street. A motor truck came along.'

He talked fast, inventing his story as he did so, and he sobbed with all his heart, for the aeroplane was really lost to him. The godfather was convinced. The despair of the child softened him. His displeasure faded away.

'Bah!' said he. 'Stop crying. Toys are made only to be broken. The next time I'll send you something good and strong.' Then he went out with Pierre's father, while Pierre remained alone with his mother. She looked at him a long minute without saying a single word, and then, still silent, ended it all by taking him to her room and washing his tear-stained face.

[*The London Mercury*]

SHELLEY AND HIS PUBLISHERS

BY ROGER INGPEN

SHELLEY'S transactions with his publishers were numerous; the books of no great English poet, and certainly none whose literary career at the most extended for not more than thirteen years, can have borne the names of so many separate firms. Until he placed his poems in the hands of the Olliers, almost every book was issued by a new publisher. Everyone of his works was a failure, and only one went into a second edition; his wide fame as a poet was entirely posthumous.

Although none of Shelley's publishers was sufficiently interested to repeat the experience of issuing a second book by him, he was not dis-

couraged by this want of sympathy. He continued until the end to write and to print his works at his own expense, and, if possible, to find publishers for them. In the absence of a publisher he issued them himself. He began and ended by verse writing, but in the interval his work was varied enough, comprising novels, drama, philosophy, satire, religious polemics, and politics.

In recalling some facts connected with Shelley's literary enterprises a curious repetition of names and incidents will be noticeable. There were two separate publishers of the name of Stockdale with whom he treated, one