It was December. The 24th, to be a bit more explicit. And it was cold. Bitter cold. For the most part, the streets were deserted and lonely. Dressed in a heavy topcoat, its fur-lined collar drawn up around his neck, the man took long, brisk steps toward the railroad station. Bits of paper, swept by the cold wind near the water-front, rattled along beside him.
He could have called a cab, but he chose not to. He wanted to walk. He needed the walk; it gave him time to think. And time to be alone with himself, too. He had kept busy; too busy. But then, busyness had drowned his sorrow and grief. To a degree, that is.

A train whistled somewhere in the distance. He hurried his pace. Then he remembered that he had time. Plenty of time. That's why he left early; so he'd have time.

He was passing an old cathedral. He would have gone by, too, but for the sound of an organ coming through its great, heavy, ornate door, left standing partially ajar by the last one entering, he was sure.

He turned 'round on his heel. Strange, he thought, that he hadn't noticed the cathedral before; it standing beautiful and apparently structurally sound in spite of the myriad years that had swept over it. Its steeple pointed a solemn finger upward; a silent reminder that God was in His Heaven and that His eyes ran to and fro throughout the whole earth beholding the deeds of every man. And keeping accurate records, also.

Eight steps, he counted, leading up to the great door. He paused for a moment and stared wonderingly at the building whose stone exterior seemed impervious of time, age or change. "Amazing!" he exclaimed to himself half-aloud. Again, "Amazing!"

Unhurriedly, he climbed the steps, the crescendo of the organ's notes drawing him to the great, heavy door like a magnet. It was magnificent, the music. Who was the great master who could play with such feeling? he wondered, slipping noiselessly through the partially-opened door.

He stood for a while, giving his eyes time to adjust to the dimness of light within. Then he took a step forward. Then another, and another. Suddenly he realized that he was alone. He, and the master of the magnificent music. Bolder now, he walked to the front of the cathedral and seated himself in the first pew. Then he closed his eyes and listened to the great swelling music coming from the organ.

Involuntarily his mind and his thoughts took a journey back into time. He was a mere twenty-two years old then, he mused, feeling moisture
collecting in his eyes. And he was . . . well . . . different then. Yes, different was the proper word to use, he knew.

The music changed suddenly. He "caught" its change immediately. No longer did the great cathedral vibrate with the swelling, almost thunderous, notes; instead, it came out in softly "whispered" tones that sounded more like the distant chiming of bells. He held his breath, afraid of missing a single note. It was beautiful. Beautiful! Sacred, too. It did something to a man. Gripped him. Tore him all up inside.

Adjusted to the light now, he looked toward the balcony. Toward the organ. The silver-gray hair of the organist caught his attention: The master musician was old. Very old. And bent, too. But his head was raised. He was looking upward; almost like he was beholding things too sacred for mortal ears to hear. There was a light on his face. It shone. Little wonder that the music was so full of feeling; the master's fingers revealed the soul's glory and rapture; its inner peace and contentment.

Tears moistened the listener's eyes. Then he was crying. It was good to cry again, he thought. It had been so long since he had been able to shed tears. Bitterness was a deadly and devastating thing. It was like acid; it ate and ate at one's inner being until it destroyed everything good and pleasant and beautiful.

The music continued. He sat. Alone with himself. With his thoughts. His attitudes. His feelings. And with his binding bitterness. He had thought he could get away from everyone, and everything familiar, too; thought that would erase the bitterness from within. But he had been wrong: Instead of assuaging the gnawing, unrelenting thing, it had only served to feed it; to intensify it, until now his soul was all but consumed by it.

He moved ever so slightly in the pew. He felt empty. Hollow; like his entire being was a void. He who had tried so hard to be successful, and had succeeded, could it be possible that this bitterness had put him beyond the reach of help? Had he come to the point of no return?

More tears. And with the tears came an overwhelming fear. And dread. "Bitterness, once given entrance, and allowed residency," his kind and loving mother had told him, "is hard to get rid of, Son. In many instances, its bearers go to their grave consumed by it. And lost, too. Forever!"
He shivered in the semi-light. Lost! Forever! No return! He wondered if he was that far gone. He had drunk of its bitter cup for fifteen years or better and he didn't know how to empty it from his wretchedly miserable soul now. It went to work with him, it ate with him, it traveled the highways with him, dictated to him, and even went to bed with him. Everywhere, and all the time, it seemed, bitterness was with him. He was, indeed, all but consumed by it.

His eyes wet with tears, the man looked toward the bent form with upraised head and eyes on the organ bench. It was apparent that the master musician and his God knew each other intimately. Very intimately: his face looked like the face of an angel. His skilled fingers relayed Heaven's message of love and peace and hope and joy to a fallen race. It was all there . . . the message . . . coming through the Spirit-filled man at the organ.

Suddenly the music ceased. A holy hush and awe filled the vast stone building. The man felt God's presence. The Lord was there beside him. The tug at his heart was overpowering. He sobbed like the little child used to do; the one whom he had had to lay away two days after the mother was buried . . . his wife. His sweet-heart. Violent sobs shook his manly frame. Willingly, he poured out the bitterness, emptying the cup to its last drop before the pleading, beckoning One. He felt it leave him then; felt it wash clean away in the fountain filled with Blood. It was gone. Forever. He was new.

New in Christ. Oh he was so happy. God's holy peace was now once again inside him. He was changed. It was glory. And glorious. So very real.

Out of the pregnant silence emerged the muted sound of a great clock striking the hour of eight. As if by a signal, a host of people crowded through the doorway and filled every pew inside. Reverently and quietly they came. The air was filled with expectancy. The man was awe-smitten.

Sitting quietly-serene with bowed head and closed eyes, the master musician suddenly raised his head. Then, in a joyous, swelling crescendo of Joy to the World, the assemblage arose like one man and began to sing. The man, happy now in his spiritual rebirth, sang like he had never sung before: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. . . ."

Walking toward the railroad station a short time later, his new-in-Christ eyes noticed the beauty of glittering snow on the sidewalk; noticed, too, the
brilliance of the stars and the deep blue-black of the sky. It was beautiful. Everything that God had created and made was beautiful. It had been beautiful all the time, but the robber, bitterness, had blinded his eyes to everything but to itself. He was now liberated, thanks be unto God. His eyes were opened and he was set free. It was a December night he would remember so long as he lived, he knew.

A train's whistle alerted him to the need for hurry now. His stay in the cathedral had whittled away on his reserve of time. But it had been the most profitable and blessed thing which he had done in more than fifteen years. He would never again be the same. He would go back to his company a new man, with a change of heart and changed attitudes. Changed moods, too. And his men would notice the change, too. How they would notice!

He entered the railroad station's main lobby with a light step. He even smiled at the clerks at the desk. Oh but it felt good to be able to smile once again. So good. He hadn't realized, not until a short while ago, just how many beautiful and wonderful qualities, and necessary-in-life things, his bitterness had robbed him of. And deprived him of. And for better than fifteen years too!

He bought his ticket. Then he walked to the gate through which he would pass to go to train number 309. His heart was strangely moved upon. He would not only be seeing his aging parents but Glenn, as well. Yes, Glenn especially. This time home he would go to see Glenn. For more than fifteen years he had kept Glenn locked out of his heart and out of his mind. Now, though, he didn't feel bitter toward Glenn anymore. God had washed it away when He had forgiven his sins and changed his heart. It would be easy to go to Glenn's house now and tell him how sorry he was that he hadn't forgiven him for killing his wife and their only child.

His manly frame shook with remorse. He had been such a fool. He could have had the tire to go flat on his car, and his car could have gone out of control, as Glenn's had done, and he could have killed Glenn's wife and their two children. But instead, it had been Glenn's tire that had gone flat. He had had little control over the car when it happened. He, Glenn, had been every bit as innocent of the tragedy as were those two who died because of it!
"What a fool I was!" he muttered sadly to himself. "And to think that I allowed that bitterness to dictate my life; to keep me from one who was for long years once my best friend! And him innocent and blameless, too!"

He heard the train's whistle. With a light step he passed through the iron gate and headed toward the train. This time, the trip home would be a time of restitution; a time for saying "I'm sorry; forgive me. I was wrong." Already his heart felt lighter. And he was happy. Truly happy -- in the state of forgiveness and forgiving.