

CANDLES'
BEAMS

—
FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.

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HIS FIRST AND LAST APPEARANCE

BUT THY LOVE AND THY GRACE



“While Manuel waved the sword, Carmelita dug furiously with her hands.”
(Page 124)

Candles' Beams

BY

FRANCIS J. FINN, S. J.

*Author of "Tom Playfair", "Percy Wynn",
"That Football Game", etc.*



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*How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.*

The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Sc. 2

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THE CANDLE'S BEAMS

AS Father David Rohan stepped into the waters of the Mississippi, ancient memories returned. It was here as a boy that, by his skill in swimming, he showed the promises afterward fulfilled in his becoming the finest athlete in Campion College. It was here, ancient memories reminded him, that after winning an exhausting swimming race of two hundred yards, he swam out, while still pumping for wind, into midstream and rescued an exhausted contestant.

This part of the upper Mississippi, some few miles above Dubuque, he had not seen since, seven years before, he had gone to the seminary. Many things had happened in these seven years. He had won out in philosophy and in theology as he had previously won out in athletics; he had achieved the priesthood—he could still almost sense the holy oils recently placed upon his hands—and he had lost his health.

Physicians had insisted that after ordination he should return to his native village, and, for a few months, resume, so far as possible, his old life on and in the river.

One of them told him he would recover; two others shrugged their shoulders; and Father David clearly understood that they had pronounced his death warrant.

But just now as, using the Australian crawl, he made his way out into midstream, his whole being revolted against their decision. He was himself again. He felt that he could, if put to it, win many another medal in the Mississippi waters.

Upon the heels of this buoyant feeling there suddenly came a sense of lassitude; and he had not made one hundred yards—he to whom a mile or more was once nothing.

“Pshaw!” he said, turning upon his back and floating. “What else could I expect? I’m out of condition. The wonder is I could go this far without losing my wind.”

Then he turned once more, and with a gentler, easier stroke made for the bank. Even as he turned, an apparition met his gaze.

Coming down, with measured pace, towards the shore was a young miss of nine. She appeared to be a gypsy. Her black hair failed to show even a distant acquaintance with comb and brush. It was a long, tangled mass. She was barefooted, barelegged, clothed in a slip of a gown.

The girl, as the Father scanned her, continued her grave walk till she reached the water's edge; and, instead of halting, walked in. Land and water seemed all one to her.

Out into the water she stepped, until she was waist deep. Then throwing herself forward she began to kick and splash with enough vigor, apparently, to supply power for a large factory. This tremendous activity she kept up for fully five minutes, by which time she had swum about two feet.

"That little gypsy," soliloquized Father David, "has put enough energy into her performance to carry her half way across the river."

"I say, Sissie," he remarked, as with his easy stroke he came within reach of the panting maid, "who taught you how to swim?"

"There ain't nobody taught me; and I wish they would. I'm crazy to be a good swimmer."

In a few minutes Father David got it into the head of the impressionable child that it was not necessary, in order to swim, to kick all the water possible into the air. Swimming was not exactly a shower bath.

"Say," said the girl after mastering this truth, "my name's Emily—Emily Billic; and I go to school, and I hate books, and what's yours?"

"My name is David Rohan."

"Oh! Are you the great swimmer that they all talk about?"

"I was a pretty good swimmer in my day," returned the priest.

"Oh! I want to learn from you. Say, do you think I'll make a great swimmer?"

"Judging by the progress you have made in the last ten minutes, I should think you would."

"Hi! Hi!" screamed Emily. "Teach me some more."

And teach her more he then and there did. Emily was not a gypsy. In fact, her face, yielding to the softening influences of the water, had become almost fair. She had no fear of the water. Whether her head was above or below seemed, so long as she could hold her breath, all one to her. It was quite conceivable that she could drown without discovering that disconcerting fact

up to the last minute. The involuntary swallowing of the water seemed to her to be a part of the sport.

The only thing that evidently did worry the child was her dress. Three pins held it together; and these pins were not always faithful to their trust. More than once she ceased her exertions to get one pin or another into a resumption of service. It was in the pauses of one of these difficult tasks that she suddenly lifted changed eyes upon the young priest.

“O, say! Aren’t you a Fader?”

“I’ve been a priest for two weeks, Emily.”

“Say, I forgot; excuse me.”

Emily, as Father David clearly understood, referred to certain expressions which in previous moments of excitement had slipped from her innocent lips. If the priest could believe his ears, she had once, when he failed to reach her in time, addressed him cold-bloodedly as “You devil.” But he had not believed his ears at the moment.

“Say, Fader, will you give me a medal?”

“Are you a Catholic?”

“I was baptized; but I don’t know nothing.”

“Doesn’t your mother teach you your prayers?”

Emily shut her eyes, put her hands together and said:

“Name Fader, Son, Holy Ghost—Now I lay me down to sleep—Haily Mary now and at the hour of debt, amen.” Then she opened her eyes and looked for approval.

“Is that all you know?”

“I knew more, Fader; but I forgot.”

“And does your mother let you go swimming alone?”

“My mudder is dead. She went dead three years ago. And my fader, he is a fisher, and he sleep all day, and he fish all night. And he isn’t a Catholic; and he don’t care where I go, so I don’t wake him up.”

“Good gracious! And you are your own dress-maker?”

“I’ve got anudder dress besides this.”

Father David removed a string from his neck. On it were fastened a scapular medal and what is known as the miraculous medal of Our Lady. This latter he detached and gave to the child.

“Wear that all your life, Emily; it is the medal of God’s own Mother.”

Emily’s eyes showed the gratitude which her limited command of language

failed to express. She hurried from the water, disappeared momentarily behind some bushes, and returned presently with the medal, attached to a very ancient shoe lace, hanging about her neck.

“Say, Fader, when are you coming swimming again?”

“I hope to come to-morrow at this same hour—four o’clock.”

“Four o’clock? And will you teach me some more?”

“Gladly.”

“Come on; let’s swim again.”

“Thank you, Emily,” returned the priest, whose lips were blue and trembling. “But I’m afraid I’ve stayed in too long. Now you run away and leave me to dress.”

“Good-bye, Fader.” Here Emily smiled engagingly and held up two fingers.

“Four o’clock? To-morrow?”

And Emily, like some infant naiad, turned and was lost in the trees.

The next morning Emily, at her humble home, received a package. She opened it in some fear and much wonder. She looked, she shrieked, she jumped into the air, putting, in the act, all three pins out of commission, and then, as she regained her feet, she kissed the medal, which was the only ornament that graced her sturdy person.

The package contained a dainty bathing suit. It was the first decent thing in the way of apparel she had received since her mother’s death.

When Father David, accompanied by a lad of twelve, reached the watery trysting place next day, he found the young naiad in all the glory of a many colored swimming suit. Her tangle of hair was hidden under a cap red as the head of a woodpecker. Altogether she was in appearance a much improved girl. On seeing Father David she set the woods ringing his name in welcome, and as she entreatingly added, “Hurry, Fader, come on in quick!” she proceeded to swim according to the directions given her the day before. Here, too, she displayed an extraordinary change for the better.

“I declare,” exclaimed Father David, as he entered the waters, “you have improved wonderfully. How did you do it?”

“Just as soon as I got my new suit,” answered the naiad, stepping on the bank and strutting proudly up and down to give her two companions an opportunity to see her in all her splendor of color, “I came right down and practised what you told me, Fader. That was at ten o’clock. Then I came down at eleven o’clock; then I came at twelve o’clock; and at one o’clock and at two o’clock.”

“Did you have any time for dinner?”

“I forgot all about dinner. Say, Fader, how do I look?” And Emily, with mouth and eyes opened to their widest, gazed earnestly into Father David’s face.

“You look simply elegant. I never saw any swimmer of your age look any finer; and you have improved wonderfully in swimming. Why, if you go on this way I’ll be able to teach you all I know in a week.”

For the next half hour Father David had two eager pupils on his hands. Master Tom Reynolds had thought he knew much of swimming, but he changed his mind during that afternoon. He had much to learn, and he went about it with almost the eagerness of Emily. Both children would do anything, however desperate, to win Father David’s slow, quiet smile and nod of approval. His lightest word was to them a command that must be obeyed. They were not only his pupils, but his slaves. And that slavery was made complete at the end of the swim, when Father David said to Tommie:

“Look you, Tommie, you can dress much quicker than I”—which, inasmuch as Tommie’s clothes consisted of a pair of jumpers, was manifestly true. “Now hurry into your things, and here’s some money. Go and buy ten cents’ worth of crackers and five cents’ worth of cheese.”

These words were not fairly out of the Father’s mouth before Tommie, fully robed, was off at a smart trot.

The naiad, meantime, also fully dressed—if the word fully could apply to anything so inadequate as her three-pin rag affair—was content to sit quietly behind some trees, as Father David had ordered her, looking with eager expectancy out upon the river—though the river, it must be confessed, had nothing whatever to do with that look of expectancy.

Father David was just about ready to show himself in public when Thomas returned.

Then there was a feast.

The revellers were two in number; and Thomas, though proud, with good reason, of his appetite, compared very poorly in efficiency with the half-starved naiad.

In the course of the banquet, the priest pointed out with some directness that people did not consider it good form to bolt their food. Teeth had their uses, too. And Emily, thinking, no doubt, that these words were an integral part of her swimming lessons, meekly submitted, and put her teeth to a use to which they had previously been strangers.

“Tell me, Fader,” ventured Emily upon the complete disappearance of the

crackers and cheese, “are you going to stay here all the time?”

“O, how I wish you would!” eagerly the boy put in.

“I’ll be here only for two months at the most,” returned the Father, conscious of the intent eyes fastened upon him. He paused for a moment, and in the pause a dreamy expression settled upon his face. “*I shall pass this way only once,*” he added: “therefore—” He finished this sentence by bestowing upon his two listeners a smile, radiant, warm, yet touched with the awesomeness of one who is dipping into the finalities of the future. “Now, Tom, suppose we start back.”

“Won’t you come to-morrow, Fader?” cried Emily.

“I hope so.”

“At four o’clock?”

“Yes, Emily.”

“I’ll be waiting over at those trees, and I’ll not go in the water till you are ready.”

“Very good. Good-bye.”

The boy and the priest had not gone far when Emily came rushing down upon them at top speed.

“Say, Fader, I want to ask you something.”

“Well, child?”

Emily motioned Thomas away.

“Fader,” she whispered, “when you go away, won’t you take me with you?”

Father David had had many experiences in his thirty-two years of life, but never one so poignant as this. He had seen but a few moments before into his own future, and now he fancied he was looking into that of the child! Her upturned face was coarse, her eyes were bold, and, God help her, pathetic beyond words. There was little trace of refinement in her features and, judging by what he had learned of her home life, less promise. The only saving grace of her countenance was youthful innocence, a gracious thing which, like the lily, is here to-day and gone to-morrow. There was something else in her face which somehow Father David failed to note; it was love, love for him. Instead of answering her question, the priest, thinking at once of his own future and hers, laid his hand upon her tousled hair and said, “God bless you, my child.”

And Emily, kissing the medal, her only ornament, grinned and darted back into the woodlands.

It was an afternoon in August, five weeks since the Wisconsin naiad had

startled the young priest. Four o'clock had passed. At the river's edge stood Emily, waiting. The minutes went on haltingly; they changed into quarters. At last Thomas Reynolds appeared, dressed rather elaborately. There were shoes upon his feet.

"Where's the Fader?" asked the girl.

"He—he's not coming down to-day. He's not coming no more," answered Tom.

"Is he sick?"

"I should say he is. Last night he had a hemilage."

"A what?"

"A hemilage. He spitted blood. He nearly died."

"And—and is he better?" gasped the girl.

"The hemilage has stopped, but he's weak as a cat. And he's ordered to leave this place right away, and g-g-g-o to an 'orspital."

Tommie caught his breath several times as he spoke, while a tearful dimness obscured his eyesight. Emily, whose mouth throughout this disclosure had been wide open, let out a long and loud wail of grief. Literally she lifted up her voice and wept, while down her cheeks coursed a quick succession of tiny drops of tears.

Grief is catching. Tommie boohooed. For a few seconds he gave a loose rein to his grief; then remembering that he was a boy he set himself to check it, with the result that for several moments he made a series of extraordinary faces.

"Say, you baby," he at length managed to say, "stop that confounded squalling."

These words were uttered, as it happened, at a point where Emily, losing her wind, had stopped to take a full breath to be converted presently into another squall. So Emily caught his words. She closed her mouth, gulped, while her eyes seemed to spit forth sparks. Her face grew black.

"You devil," she said fiercely.

Emily was standing on the bank. Thomas, furious at himself for what he considered his display of weakness, and furious at the girl for her display of temper, gave her a push. Over she went backward into the river; whereupon for several seconds Master Tommie found himself alone.

Suddenly she arose some fifteen feet from the shore, lying on her back and floating.

In this attitude the young lady reiterated her statement with a wealth of

adjectives flanked by some extraordinary expletives. Emily was in a towering rage, and she was expressing herself in the artless and profane language which her father, in fits of anger, was wont to employ.

Tommie picked up a clam shell and sent it flying at the bobbing, red-capped head. Emily promptly dived to reappear several yards farther out. As her head came to the surface, another shell came whizzing toward her. She dived again. Tommie threw shells till he was tired, by which time Emily was forty yards away. At this distance it was not necessary to dive. Treading water, she made another speech to Tommie, every word of it breathing defiance, and ended by sticking out her tongue.

"You cat!" exploded Tommie. "I'm going right back to tell him what awful language you've been using."

The young lady's tongue suddenly returned to its proper place.

"O, Tommie," she implored, "don't do that! I forgot myself. Cross my heart—" There was a short interruption here. Emily in crossing her heart with undue fervor suddenly disappeared. "Cross my heart, Tom, I'm sorry and I won't do it again. Excuse me, Tom."

"And," resumed the boy, still surly, "he told me to give you a message."

At this the girl's face lighted up. Throwing herself forward she made for the shore with a speed which caused even Tommie, acquainted as he was with her prowess as a swimmer, to wonder. Tommie had good reason to admire her speed, though it did not occur to him that he was just then watching the swiftest swimmer of her age in Wisconsin and the two neighboring states.

"Say," she cried as she made land, "what—what did he say?"

"He said he wants you to keep on swimming every day."

"Yes?"

"And he is going by the 8:40 train to-night, and he wants you to come down and bid him good-bye. Say, Emily, he thinks a whole lot of you."

Emily's face softened. Just then she looked beautiful.

"Say, Tom, I hope my dad will lash the daylights out of me when I get home. I'm sorry for all I said. I'm bad—oh, say, you won't tell the Fader?"

"No, Emily, I won't, and—eh—Emily, you won't say anything about my shying those shells at you? I lost my temper and I'm sorry, too."

"Not a word, Tom! And I'll be at the depot at eight o'clock."

And at eight o'clock the naiad was on hand. She was dressed for the occasion. Shoes and stockings were on her feet, what though one of those

stockings was white and the other black. An absurd hat, with absurd artificial flowers, intended for a full-grown miss, concealed her tangled locks, and a white apron hid from view the many open spaces of her best dress. In one hand the naiad carried a bundle wrapped in a torrid looking bandanna; in the other a gorgeous bouquet of wild flowers, in the gathering of which she had spent more than an hour. There were also some beautiful roses which, truth compels me to say, were taken from the garden of a neighbor without his knowledge or consent.

“Look at the little water-devil,” observed the station agent. “What in the world is she up to? Never saw her so elaborately dressed before.”

Luckily for him the fair child failed to hear his remarks.

Emily seated herself solemnly and waited. Her mouth, an unusual thing, was closed, and her eyes, oblivious of all the sights of a railroad station at train time, were fixed intently upon the far horizon.

“Go away, I don’t want to talk,” she remarked severely to several who undertook to question her.

Ten minutes before train time a cab drew up, and from it, leaning upon the arm of Tommie and another boy, issued Father David. His face was bloodless, his eyes glassy.

“O, Fader!” bellowed the maid.

And Father David, hearing the familiar voice, broke into a smile so sunny, so genial, that for the moment he seemed to be his old self.

“Why, Emily!” he said, holding out welcoming hands.

“Say, Fader, I’m going with you,” said Emily. “I’m all ready to go. I’ve brought my clothes and my bathing suit.”

“But, my dear child, you can’t leave your father.”

“He won’t care. He don’t know, anyhow. O, Fader, please, please take me.”

“Emily,” said the Father, “I’m going to a hospital.”

“I’ll go, too.”

“No, my dear, that cannot be.”

“And when are you coming back, Fader?”

“I fear, Emily, I shall not pass this way again.”

“Aren’t you coming back?”

“That is as God pleases.”

Then Emily presented the flowers. For the time all her roughness was gone. She showed for a moment what she might have been under other

circumstances. Father David was touched; the tears came to his eyes.

“God bless you,” he said hurriedly, and turned away.

Tommie Reynolds accompanied him into the car; and rage, jealous rage, entered the sorrow-stricken soul of the lone girl on the platform.

She was still boiling over when the train started. And in that moment she saw Tommie in the vestibule shaking hands with “the Father.”

This was too much. Throwing herself on the platform, face up, she howled and kicked in an abandon of grief till the train was out of sight.

In the spring of 1926, the Catholic hospital at La Crosse was all the brighter for the presence of a newly ordained priest. A slight nervous breakdown, occasioned by hard study and the ordeal of ordination, in no wise interfered with his ready smile and his sunny way of dealing with all who met him. In fact, he claimed that he had no reason at all for being in a hospital. He felt all right. He wanted to work. But his good bishop had insisted on his playing the invalid.

No doubt the good bishop was correct. The young priest had entered the room assigned him three weeks before, pale and hollow-eyed. And now his eyes were bright, twinkling, and upon his cheeks had come a pair of roses which put him quite in keeping with the rosy springtime.

At the moment that there came a knock at his door, he had just finished reading, for the twentieth time, this paragraph from a well worn manuscript, “The Diary of a Hospital Chaplain:”

Dec. 12, 1911. This morning at ten o’clock, died in the odor of sanctity, Father David Rohan. He was conscious to the last; sweet, affable, winning in word and manner. I never knew a lovelier soul. He had no fear of death. His last words were, “If God calls me, I am perfectly willing to go. But when I meet Our dear Lord, I am going to have a sort of a quarrel with Him.” When Father David said this, I, little knowing that his last moment was at hand, broke into a laugh. The idea! Father David would not quarrel with the meanest and most abandoned soul on earth. “Well, anyhow,” he added with that smile which, in winningness and sweetness, was unchanged, “I’m going to remonstrate with Him, and I am going to say something like this: ‘My dear Lord and Saviour, You have been good to me beyond measure. You gave me good parents, good friends, a good education, and no end of joy. Best of all, you were pleased, in your infinite goodness, to call me to the priesthood, and to allow me the greatest

of all earthly privileges—to say Mass, and to say it eighty-seven times. But a priest ought to save souls. That’s his business. And I have not had a chance to save a single one. Why didn’t you allow me to save one soul before I died?” Father David came to a pause. His voice had grown weaker and weaker. He made me a motion. I understood. I caught up the crucifix, which he in his weakness could not reach, and held it before his dimming eyes. He repeated with me the Act of Love. Then as I gave him absolution and put the sacred image to his lips, he whispered, “O Lord Jesus, give me one soul before I go.” Then his head fell back. All was over. God rest his lovely soul. No doubt Our Lord knew what was best. Father David died without any chance to exercise the holy ministry, without any opportunity of saving a single soul.

The young priest, I say, had just finished the reading of these paragraphs, and had taken out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, when there came a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he said.

The door opened, revealing the superioress.

“Good morning, Father. Are you ready for your first confession?”

“This—this,” he answered, “is so sudden.”

“But it’s an urgent case, Father. There’s a woman just brought in. It’s a clear case of lockjaw, and, although she looks perfectly well, she’ll be dead before night. She may become unconscious before long, and our regular chaplain has gone to visit the bishop on business.”

“O, in that case I’ll be only too glad, Sister.”

“As this is to be your first confession, Father, you will allow an old woman, old enough to be your mother, to prepare you. The woman is, and has been, a hardened and notorious sinner. She was brought in here cursing and screaming, and somewhat the worse for liquor. Our sisters at first could do nothing with her; and it took three of our male nurses to get her, kicking, biting, struggling, into the room assigned her. But here comes the strange part: no sooner did she enter the room than she at once quieted down. Her eyes grew soft, and she burst into a fit of weeping. When she could control herself, she turned to me and said, ‘Sister, I beg pardon, I am ashamed of myself. I know I’m going to die, and O, Sister, please get me a priest.’ And then she fell to weeping bitterly again. Never did I see so sudden and so extraordinary a change.”

The young priest arose, procured a stole and the holy oils, and said:

"I'm ready, Mother Superior; ask all the Sisters who can spare the time to go to the chapel and pray that I may handle this case right."

On entering the woman's room they discovered her lying quiet and calm, though the tears upon her face told the tale of her recent emotion. She was young; but dissipation had added years to her appearance.

"Father, Father!" she cried, raising hands of supplication, "will you help me? I've never been to confession in my life."

"Certainly, my child. You need not worry at all."

The Superior left the room and remained outside for nearly fifteen minutes. Then the door opened.

"Her confession is made," said the priest gravely. "Now for Extreme Unction and Holy Communion."

At these last rites there were present seven Sisters. Three of them wept openly. None of them had ever seen a dying person receive the last sacraments with such lively sentiments of faith, hope and love.

"Before I die," said the penitent, "I want to ask pardon of all the world for my scandalous life. I've been bad, bad, bad. Father, will you stay with me a little longer?"

The Sisters left the room, all save the Superior, who was holding the dying woman's hand.

"Father, do you know that you remind me of the dearest and best and only friend I ever had?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; you have his nice smile and manner. It is sixteen years since I saw him. I knew him only for a few weeks."

"Where is he now, my child?"

"He died long ago. He was a priest—he taught me to swim."

"Good God!" cried the young priest, jumping to his feet and gazing intently on the woman's face. "You are Emily!"

The woman on the bed rose up, her eyes all eagerness, and returned the priest's gaze.

"And you," she said, "are Tommie Reynolds. No wonder you reminded me of dear, dear Father David Rohan."

It was now the Superior's turn to be astonished.

"Why—why," she exclaimed, "Father David Rohan died in this very room."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Emily. "I felt him near. He's here now. It is he who

drove the devils out of me when those men forced me into this room. It was he who filled my heart all of a sudden with love of Jesus and sorrow for my horrible life.”

“And it was he,” resumed the superior, “whose last prayer and last words to the dear Lord were that he might not die before winning one sinner. Emily, he was praying for you; and his prayer was answered.”

“And it was he,” added Father Reynolds, “who in his few weeks’ dealings with me aroused in my soul—without his ever saying a word about it—an ardent desire for the priesthood. In all these years I have never forgotten him, and, Emily, you paid me just now the greatest compliment I could ask. You told me I acted like him. Well, I’ve been trying to do that for these last fifteen years.”

“After his death,” said the Superior, “his grave for over a year was visited daily by little children whom he had met during his last sickness in this hospital. And for the last ten years there are flowers laid upon his grave every week. Some grateful child has never forgotten him.”

“Sister,” said Emily, her face flushing and growing girlish, “I was that child.”

“ ‘How far a little candle throws its beams,
So shines a good deed in a naughty world,’ ”

quoted Father Reynolds. “Whenever I meet those lines I always think of dear Father David. And do you remember, Emily, his saying, ‘I shall not pass this way again’?”

“Indeed, I do. I often wondered what he meant.”

“So did I when I was a boy. But I found out during my studies. Here’s the entire quotation. I repeat it to myself every day:

‘I expect to pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do my fellow beings, let me not defer or neglect it; for I shall not pass this way again.’ ”

“I am happier now,” said Emily, “than I ever was since I met him on the river’s bank. God knows I have been wicked, but God knows, too, that the memory of his kindness to me has inspired me to save and protect many and many a poor, deserted little girl. And I know that he has saved my soul, and he has made you a priest to carry on the work he would have done. O, Father Thomas, be kind, be kind, be kind—especially to the poor little ones. Souls are being lost for want of kindness.”

“God helping me, I will, Emily.”

“And now, Sister and Father, I want to be alone. I want to talk to Our Lord.” She paused a moment and then continued, “I saw his grave the other day, and there came back to me the only two lines of poetry I ever learned by heart, and I learned them because they fitted him:

‘Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.’ ”

And as Father Reynolds and the Superior left the room, their last glimpse showed them Emily kissing the crucifix and the last words they heard from her lips were: “My Jesus, mercy.”

ROUGHNECK

ROUGHNECK

I

AMONG the fifty and odd boys of the fourth grade who faced me on the opening day of school, there was one who caught my attention within the first five minutes of class. His face was amiability itself. When he smiled—and I noticed that he was seeking every opportunity to perform that pleasing act—his mouth, large by nature, dilated to a striking degree, and his entire face radiated good nature.

He was hardly a handsome boy, much less was he pretty. His nose was tip-tilted, his face was extremely freckled, and his hair anarchistic. His features, in general large and coarse, were redeemed by a pair of large grey eyes, and an expression—temporary, it might be—of effusive good nature.

His attire puzzled me. It was not convincing. Face and clothes did not jump together. His collar and tie were immaculately clean; his clothes, spick and span. The face was the face of Huckleberry Finn; the attire was the attire of Little Lord Fauntleroy.

I had opened the school year with a short talk on the importance of study, good conduct and attention. It was an eager audience I was addressing—an awed crowd of little boys who had never yet sat under a *man* teacher. But the attention of this particular boy led all the rest. His eyes were fixed squarely upon mine; they twinkled if I so much as came near to a pleasantry; they danced if I actually got off a joke; and when there was occasion for laughter his treble rose high above all other sounds of glee.

Presently, I found myself addressing him alone. He was an audience in himself. In an unhappy moment, chancing to notice how his ears stood out prominently from his head and wondering whether he could wag them, I broke into a smile which really had nothing to do with what I then happened to be saying. My sympathetic audience of one, misled utterly, at once broke into a laugh of keen appreciation. One would think it was the best joke he had ever heard. As a matter of fact, I had just made the following original statement: “A

year wasted, a year of idleness, is a year that is lost forever.”

The hearty laughter of my freckled-faced audience rang out alone. It started off buoyantly, and suddenly subsided as though an invisible hand at one fell grip had choked it into silence.

“Ah, Roughneck, wot’s the matter with you?” came a voice in a low whisper which somehow reached my ears.

Ah! so my friend, my audience, was “Roughneck.”

The young gentleman thus addressed went the color of a boiled lobster, and incontinently turned in his seat to eye his monitor. The amiability was all gone; the mouth wore a snarl, and several particular clusters of hair seemed to rear their angry crests upon Roughneck’s untamed head.

Then all the boys laughed, not at any real or fancied joke of mine, but at the blushing and irate Roughneck.

Later on, while I was passing over to the blackboard, I *thought* I saw out of the corner of my eye, a shiny fist—even the shininess was suspicious—shaking itself in the direction of Roughneck’s offender; and the suspicion deepened into a certainty after recess when Roughneck returned to class with a scratched cheek and a skinned knuckle, and his insulting schoolmate with a very suspicious eye.

“Your name, sir,” I said rather sternly when all had been duly seated.

“Please, Brother, Frank Reardon,” said my whilom audience of one.

“And yours, sir?” I continued addressing myself to the youngster of impaired eyesight.

In a hollow, deep voice, surprisingly deep for one of his years, the youth in question, a very fat boy with a very serious face, made answer.

“Ed Stevens.” His voice seemed to come from his boots.

“I must say,” I continued, “that you’re both a nice pair to begin the school year with hammering each other.”

Upon the class there came a great awe. They all knew I had remained in the classroom during recess. How then had I seen through walls and from a height of three stories a little affair which had happened in an obscure corner of the playground on the other side of the building. Ed Stevens, familiarly known as Fatty, allowed his lower jaw to fall and gaped at me, breathing heavily; Roughneck, so called, as I already inferred, because of a certain manner of speech and action in keeping with his upturned nose and freckled face, opened his eyes to their widest, and, within a few seconds’ time gave me, gazing into their depths, a moving picture of swift and varying emotion, wild surprise, fear of a whipping, shame at discovery, and, to end the play, two large tears which

gathered so rapidly that they were each speeding their way down his cheek, telling their story of wounded self-love and repentance. In fear of a fresh discharge, I said:

“Well, Frank, don’t take it hard. As it is the first offence, I’m going to forget it here and now.”

A timid finger went up, its owner a thin eager-faced boy occupying one of the front seats.

“Well, John, what is it?”

“Sister—I mean Brother—it wasn’t so awful much of a fight.”

I learned afterwards that John Hogarth, whose name I had picked up, much to his and the class’s astonishment, during recess, was a bosom friend of Fatty.

Then pandemonium, so to speak, broke loose; and, unused as I was to such very small boys, reigned for almost a minute. “Fatty hit him first”—“Naw, he didn’t”—“Roughneck had him skinned”—“Aw, Fatty didn’t want to fight”—“Fatty went to Communion this morning.”

There was a strap, dread signal of authority, upon my desk. In a happy inspiration, I took it and brought it down with all my force on that unoffending article of furniture. The suggestive whack cut some twenty sentences untimely, and left their authors spellbound and with mouths arrested and open.

“Silence,” I said. The enjoinder was superfluous. Slowly each individual mouth closed—all except Roughneck’s. His was fixed apparently for all time; the boy needed a dentist badly.

“The two belligerents will please come forward.”

At the word “belligerent,” Roughneck was dissolved in tears, and Fatty, from the depths of his interior, emitted an unctuous groan.

“Reardon and Stevens,” I translated, seeing that neither quite got my idea, “come here.”

By some alchemy peculiar to the small boy, Reardon’s cheeks showed lines of dirt where the tears multitudinous had gone their way. He rose and came forward, digging his fists into his eyes, and then rubbing his fingers upon his no longer immaculate shirt-waist. Stevens, with a face so preternaturally solemn and rueful as to defy description, also came forward; so promptly, indeed, that in his eagerness to obey he knocked his friend and admirer John Hogarth out of his seat. The two were presently standing before me with solemn inquiry upon their faces, Stevens gazing fixedly at me, and Reardon eyeing with an artless trepidation the strap still in my hand.

“Now, boys,” I said, “suppose you shake hands.”

Suddenly all the solemnity flew from the expansive features of Fatty. The

change reminded me of the sun bursting away from a black cloud. Fatty was smiling; his whole being went into that smile. Up went a chubby finger: there was mirth and youthful jollity in the gesture.

“Well, my boy?”

“Please, Brother,” he gurgled deep down from, let us say, his diaphragm, “we did shake hands. We done it coming up the stairs.”

Then twenty fingers were snapping from the highly interested class. Hogarth’s face, I observed, was pregnant with information he was almost dancing to impart.

“Well, Hogarth? What is it?”

“Sister-er—Brother, I seen ’em shaking hands. And I told Fatty they ought to make up.”

It was evident from the snapping fingers on every side that half of the class was willing, nay bursting, to corroborate Master Hogarth’s pleasing information.

After laying down the law on the snapping of fingers, I gazed once more upon the culprits. Edward was again owl-like in his solemnity; but upon the tear-stained face of Master Frank the light of hope was shining to such effect that it gave me the feeling of gazing upon a rainbow.

“Now, young gentlemen,” I began—and Reardon, addressed as gentleman, suddenly lost his rainbow and became clearly disconcerted—“I said a moment ago that I was going to forget this whole incident. But I’ve changed my mind; I’m not going to forget it.”

A portentous frown gathered upon the brow of Edward Stevens; Francis Reardon absently set to wringing his hands.

“Two boys,” I continued, “who can lambast each other in one minute, and in the next shake each other’s hands, are just the kind of boys I like to know. I want to shake hands with you.”

The class gave a gasp. I was creating a sensation.

“Your hand, Frank.”

Roughneck looked at his hand as though he were bidding it a last farewell, and ruefully, gingerly, put it forward. I grasped it warmly, and forthwith the lifeless palm in mine grew warm and strong. It was, after all, a fine handshake. As I turned to my fat friend, I saw in Reardon’s eyes an expression which told me that I was his master, his hero, his beloved.

Edward was now sunlit; his hand came into mine with something more than spontaneity. It was he that did the shaking.

On my giving them the sign to return to their seats, Reardon paused and looked appealingly into my eye.

“Yes?”

“Please, Brother, I’d like to shake hands with Fatty again.”

“Yes, Brother,” growled Fatty; “me and Roughneck will do it better this time.”

“Go ahead,” I said.

It looked more like a wrestling match than a handshake. Hogarth, the enthusiastic, broke into applause. All followed his example; eighty odd hands were clapping as one. I shook my head; at once the applause ceased; and as Stevens and Reardon went back to their seats, I, who had never before had to do with boys under fourteen, realized that by a lucky series of events, I had entered into the heart of every little lad in that room.

When I came to make my examination of conscience that night it was with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God. To think of it! In the space of barely an hour I had won the hearts of, morally speaking, an entire class. There were exactly fifty-five boys in the fourth grade. Of these, I was sure that from forty-five to fifty were in bondage to my will, which meant that, using justice and kindness day after day, I could make them see things as I saw them, love the things I loved, aspire to the things I aspired to, do the things I did. There is no leadership in the world so tremendous as the leadership of a good teacher. No wonder, then, that the enemies of the Church would steal her followers by stealing her schools.

I had gone into the class that morning with no fear as to order and discipline. Almost any man can secure these things by following out a few simple rules. One may have order and hatred; discipline and underhandedness. But to have order and hearts, discipline and candor—these are things that make a teacher’s life noble and momentous.

Gratitude, however, was not my only emotion. When I considered my petty vanity, my inordinate ambition, my quick temper—in a word, when I considered all my petty faults and dangerous inclinations—I humbled myself before Christ; I begged Him to be with me in the classroom, so that, despite my miserable self, I might act and teach and think as He, the lover of little children, would have me.

II

During the month of September there was little or no change in Francis

Reardon. His attire was faultless, his attention fixed, his good will constant. No matter what question I proposed, he was the first to answer. It was clear to me that I was carrying the boy in the hollow of my hand.

“You’d better keep your eye on Roughneck,” remarked Brother Ambrose, of the fifth grade one morning at the breakfast table.

“Why, what’s the matter?” I asked.

“He’s imitating you,” Brother Ambrose made answer. “He’s taking you off. The other day, I saw him walking behind you as you were going along Fifth to Broadway, and he had that little swagger of yours down to a *t*. He was doing it, too, with perfect gravity.”

I felt myself coloring. There was a swagger in my walk and to think that my admirer, as I had thought, should be making a mock of me on a public thoroughfare was a sharp stab to my self-love.

Just then, Brother Mark, our Superior, chuckled.

“Brother Ambrose,” he said, “how often have I advised you in your dealings with the small boy to go behind the act itself and get at the motive? If you imitated Brother John’s walk, it would be an insult to Brother John. Young Reardon imitates him because he admires him. Imitation, in his case, is the sincerest flattery.”

My self-love was soothed. And now I remembered how Frank Reardon had of late gone his various ways with his head in the air, as who should say, “I am owner of earth and sky.” Could the boy be growing conceited, I had often asked myself? It now came home to me forcibly—as my novice-master had more than once told me—that I with my swaggering walk and my head in the air, was the perfect embodiment of conceit. Hereupon, I then and there at breakfast made a few good resolutions—resolutions, I am sorry to say, that I have not completely carried out up to the time of the present writing. A man who can teach boys can learn from them, too.

Early in October there came a sudden change in Francis Reardon. He who had once been so prompt in attendance at Mass, now came in after the Consecration; badly written tasks took the place of the September models of neatness; the merits of a spotless shirt were no longer his; the shining morning face grew grubby; and, in a word, the Fauntleroy in him gave place to Huck Finn. It was easy for one to understand, at this stage of the year, why Frank had with no little justice obtained the nickname Roughneck. But one thing remained unchanged—his dog-like devotion to me. This devotion was dog-like in more senses than one; it was wordless. He could *look* his devotion; he could not express it in articulate language.

In vain did I call him to account for tardiness, careless tasks, poor

recitations, neglected attire. Frank's eyes would fill, but from his mouth came no word to throw light on the situation. Those beautiful grey eyes, too, were shorn of their wonted splendor. They were heavy and unresponsive. The boy gave one the impression of indulging in late hours.

One day I lost patience with him. He had laid his head upon the desk—a thing I never tolerated—and when I called him to order he readjusted himself, rubbing his eyes the meanwhile as one aroused from sleep.

Then before the listening class I told Frank what I thought of him. My indignation presently got the better of my judgment, and—God forgive me—I said cruel things and unkind things. It was only afterwards I recalled how the poor fellow had gone pale, how the torture of his agonized soul had shot into his eyes. It pains me now to recall the scene. The boy was hurt beyond power of words to express—hurt, but not angry. That night at examination of conscience I felt like a murderer. Also, I realized that I had put in jeopardy, if I had not to some extent lost, the hold I held upon the pupils of the fourth grade.

The weeks that followed brought but little improvement in Francis Reardon. One day, having consulted with the head Brother, I gave him a whipping. I do not think that the blows hurt Frank appreciably; but I know, looking back, that my heartless manner did. I thought I was cruel only to be kind. I concealed my liking for him; I veiled my heart.

When the whipping was over and Frank left the room, I had lost an adoring friend.

My heart sank many a time during that day. Frank was obedient, but sullenness was written large upon his face. Evidently, I had blundered again; blundered irretrievably I often thought, as the days went on and Frank's demeanor grew, if anything, worse.

III

During the last week of October, a distressing thing came to pass. Penholders, pencils, pennies and what not could no longer with safety be left in the classroom. A thief had arisen amongst us.

In vain did I, in the catechism class and at other opportune moments, dilate on the terrible effects of thieving; the one person I was trying to reach was unaffected.

Young Hogarth, a daily Communicant, suggested a novena; Edward Stevens offered, in private, to act as a detective. He seemed to have the idea that a false moustache and a wig would ensure him success.

I became down-hearted. Somehow, it seemed to me my hold upon the fourth grade was slipping. The discipline was all I could desire; but the boys were no longer responsive to my suggestions. At night, my sleep was broken. Brother Mark, our kind Superior, noticed my distress, and asked the cause.

“I’m afraid, Brother, I’ve put my foot in it. I’ve given one scolding in which I went too far, and since that time there’s some sort of a veil between me and the boys. They like me yet, I think; but they are a little more distant.”

“To know your fault is by way of atoning for it, Brother John. Keep up your courage; you’ll get your power back before you know it. Just see how long you can get on without scolding—you know God has given you an over sharp tongue—and you’ll have them running to your whistle as before.”

“But that’s not all. Perhaps I should have told you before, but I found it hard to bring myself to it—there’s a thief in the class—one, if not more.”

“Have you no clue?”

“Absolutely none.”

“And you suspect no one?”

“I dare not. There’s not a boy in the class who on the face of it would seem to be capable of such a thing.”

Brother Mark pressed his hands to his forehead, and remained thus for almost a minute.

“One thing is sure,” he presently said. “It is quite possible to have a young thief in a class where a teacher is doing the very best sort of work. You have no reason, therefore, to feel discouraged. Keep your eyes open, and you’ll get the culprit; and when you do, act as you think proper. You have my permission to give him a whipping he will remember to the last day of his life.”

The days passed; the thieving continued. One afternoon, on my way home from the classroom, I remembered that I had left a set of tasks in my desk. Returning and reaching the classroom door, I recalled that I had lent Brother Ambrose my keys. Young and athletic as I am, the solution was easy. Reaching to the lower frame work of the transom, I drew myself up. And—

Francis, the boy who a month ago was my imitator—Francis was going from desk to desk, appropriating papers, pencils, and all manner of small objects. Dropping from my awkward position, I threw myself against the door, bursting the lock at the first attack. Francis jumped violently, and seeing who I was fell into the nearest seat, throwing his face downward on the desk. And there I stood looking at him, amazed, frightened. What was I to do? What could I do?

“God help me!” I cried internally. And I needed God’s help in the face of

this tragedy of youth.

“Francis,” I said at length, and my voice, I observed, sounded strange and unnatural, “empty your pockets.”

Without raising his head, the unhappy boy, using only his right hand, threw out upon the desk an assortment of odds and ends—amongst them fifteen pennies, a nickel and a dime.

I glanced from these things to the boy; his breathing was labored. I glanced at the ill-gotten goods again, and hardened my heart. That is, I tried to. It had been borne in upon me from reading and practical experience that there is an almost infallible means of curing a thief caught young—a sound, almost merciless whipping. My mind was made up. I would thrash that boy as I had never thrashed any boy, I would thrash him as he had never been thrashed before, and in all likelihood would never be thrashed again.

“Francis, hold up your head.”

The boy obeyed, and I was gazing upon a face which was to me absolutely unreadable. The eyes were cast down, the mouth closed tightly, the face set in hard lines; and yet it was quivering with some emotion which might be sorrow or anger or hatred; which was it?

As I looked down, my intended method of reforming a thief ceased to appear so simple.

“Francis,” I continued after a period of dark doubt—a period during which I earnestly prayed for light—“go through that pile of stuff and take out what is honestly yours.”

Quickly the small fingers played among the pile of articles; so quickly, so deftly, that I was asking myself whether I was gazing upon fingers which in after years would exercise their deftness in the picking of locks and the opening of safes.

It was a cool day, but I felt the perspiration breaking out upon my face. I could see the fear upon the features of Francis, I could feel the panic writ upon my own. Nevertheless, I felt I must go on to my horrible, self-imposed task.

“Have you stolen much more besides this?”

The boy bowed his head in assent.

“Can’t you speak?”

“Yes, Brother.” The words were low; but oh, the infinite sadness in the tones!

“Francis, my boy, you would not have thought of doing such a thing as stealing last September.”

The boy raised his eyes and looked me full in the face.

"I should say not," he exclaimed fervently.

A sudden light shot through my soul, and then a sudden bewilderment. The light was illuminating. *Francis Reardon would not have turned to stealing had it not been for that ill-timed and worse-worded scolding of mine.* The bewilderment was: Am I too a sharer in the guilt of this young thief?

Here was a heart, once mine, to be won again.

"Now, my boy," I said, "I had made up my mind when I caught you, to give you a trouncing you would never forget. But I'm not going to do it."

Francis turned eyes of wonder and of frank incredulity upon me.

"And more than that: no one else—no Brother, no boy, no relation even—will ever learn from me that Francis Reardon was a thief. The only one else who will ever know it will be your confessor, and him you will tell yourself."

All of a sudden, the tears came dashing from the boy's eyes; with equal suddenness he began to cry, in the literal sense of that word.

"Keep quiet, Francis; you will be heard."

The boy moderated the expression of his grief, but his sobs, suppressed though they were, were heart-rending. I waited in silence and in fear. Oh, how I dreaded making a false step!

"The reason I am not going to whip you, Francis," I resumed at length, "is that somehow I feel that I'm just as much of a thief as you. I don't think you understand what I mean just at present, but you will understand some day."

Whether he understood or not is beyond me; but in answer to this, he arose, grasped my right hand, and fell upon his knees.

"O, Brother, I'm sorry! Forgive me! and I'll do anything you say."

"Stand up, Francis. Indeed, I forgive you from my heart, and I want you to forget that awful scolding I gave you."

"Brother, I'll try to be what you want me to be."

And then I told Francis to make out an exact inventory of every thing he had stolen, and, as quickly as possible, to bring the articles back to me. From sentiment we had come down to business; and in a few minutes everything was fairly arranged. The only difficulty was in the matter of the money. Francis had spent it.

"I'll advance the eighty-three cents myself," I said, "and you can pay me in instalments."

Next day, accordingly, I was able to announce to the class,—

"There is no thief in this room; and those boys who have lost pens, paper,

pennies, or anything else, will kindly see me at recess, and get what belongs to them.”

IV

On a Monday morning of November I missed Francis Reardon from his accustomed place. Was the boy ill? For the past few weeks I had noticed a pallor upon his face—the pasty complexion seen only too often among the children of St. Xavier School; a complexion hinting at wretched nourishment, and indicating slow, slow starvation. Apparently, since the clearing up of the petty thefts, I had recaptured his heart; but his head was no longer mine. His mind was not on his studies, his attention was lackadaisical, and the written tasks he handed in were far from satisfactory. And yet the boy, it was clear, was making heroic efforts; but the efforts were as those of an oarsman against an overmastering current.

Frank was one of the few unanswered problems of my class. Everything, indeed, was going well. Every lad in the room went to Communion at least once a week; many of them daily. Master John Hogarth, following a little talk of mine on daily Communion, had constituted himself a committee of one to get the boys together on the matter. John, thin, clear-cut, frank, outspoken, earnest, reminded me often of St. Peter; he always wanted to *do* something. His friend, Edward Stevens, was ever his faithful lieutenant. Together they got up a “pledge” which read as follows: “I solemnly promise to Almighty God, His blessed Mother and Brother John, to go to Holy Communion at least once a week, if not oftener.”

They were rather hurt when I eliminated my name, both insisting that the change might affect the number of signers; but I carried my point, and they secured all the signatures. Hogarth, delighted with the success of this measure, then submitted to me another document, the composition of which, if I could judge by his ink-stained face and hands, must have cost him considerable thought and labor. It was entitled, “A Solemn Vow to go to Communion every day, meaning at least five days in the week.”

This document got no farther than my desk, and Hogarth went away, disappointed but not dispirited, to meditate new devices.

Francis Reardon was committed to go weekly; but it was doubtful whether he carried out his promise.

At recess of this particular Monday morning when Reardon was absent, Hogarth, when the others had left the room, thus addressed me:

“Say, Brother John, I think Roughneck didn’t go to Communion yesterday.

Nobody saw him anyhow.”

“How do you know? He wasn’t at the children’s Mass?”

“No; and he wasn’t at six. Fatty served six, and is sure he wasn’t there. And he wasn’t at the 8:30, because I went to it to look for him. Do you think he’s sick?”

“That’s just exactly what I do think, John.”

“Well, then, I’m going to get the kids to club in and buy him some flowers,” and John made for the door.

“Hey there! hold on, John! Suppose you wait till we know something definite.”

At noontime I spoke to Brother Mark, a man who looked like Cassius and thought like St. Francis de Sales.

“Brother Mark, Reardon, who has looked quite bad for the last month or so, is absent to-day for the first time. I know it is not your custom to visit the homes of our students without special reasons; but I think we have them in this case. There are some things about the boy that I can’t make out at all. Perhaps one visit to his home may make everything clear.”

“You are right, Brother John; there seems to be special reasons. Immediately after class, we shall go together.”

However, we did not carry out our program to the letter. Brother Mark had some business with the Father in general charge of the schools, which detained him almost an hour, and when we finally started off it was already growing dark.

As we neared the gate fronting the school, our attention was drawn to a very little girl of seven and a tiny youth of six, who were holding each other’s hands and sobbing with abandon.

“What’s the matter, little girl?” asked Brother Mark, kindly.

At this question, the diminutive youth opened his mouth, threw his head back, and roared.

“There now, little boy, don’t cry,” I exclaimed, in answer to which advice the youth took a fresh breath and broke into a still more swelling theme. Thereupon, the little girl, in sympathy, raised her shrill pipe. Hand in hand, with heads tilted towards the sky and mouths opened to their widest, the two little ones, evidently brother and sister, gave voice to their distress in a duet that would not have done discredit to an opera after the extremest manner of Strauss.

Putting aside the cacophony, the picture was a pretty one—two little figures in all the innocence of youth, with linked hands, with flaxen heads

thrown back, eyes closed, mouths open, and braced against the southern gatepost.

The situation would have puzzled me, but Brother Mark was equal to it. I saw his right hand dive into the capacious pocket of his coat and reappear with two pieces of candy. Into each open mouth the stern-faced philanthropist slipped a piece, with startling and instantaneous results. The mouths closed automatically, the heads were lowered, and the eyes opened with a new interest in things sublunary. Then there was heard instead of the late yells, the grinding of teeth.

"I've got more of the same stuff in the same pocket," said Brother Mark, speaking, as I could see by the interest he aroused, very much to the point. "Now, children, tell us what *is* the matter."

"I want to go home," cried the very little boy, relapsing into sobs.

"We're lotht," supplemented the girl. "Our big thithter Annie mus' have forgotten all about us."

Sister Annie, it would appear, was in the habit of taking them home; they lived on Gilbert Avenue, the street on which resided Francis Reardon.

"Come along, children," said Brother Mark; "we're going that way ourselves. Here, give us your hand."

There ensued a little confusion: both wanted to walk with the head Brother—the little boy coming out quite strong on the subject. Finally, with Brother Mark hand in hand with Master Eddie and myself holding the confiding, innocent hand of Edna, the procession moved forward.

There was an immediate freemasonry established between the head Brother and Eddie; I think a second piece of candy had much to do with it. Little Edna, however, for some time was silent. My questions failed to arouse her enthusiasm.

"Do you know many people on Gilbert Avenue?" I presently asked.

Then the flood-gates of her knowledge were let loose. She seemed to know everybody and everything in the section of that popular thoroughfare within the confines of St. Xavier parish. Much of her artless prattle I did not understand; but on she went from person to place, from babies to provisions, in all the sweet and lovely innocence of childhood. We had turned over on Broadway and then to Gilbert Avenue; and still she chattered. It was now twilight; the electric lights were flaring and spluttering; men and women of all sorts and conditions were rubbing elbows with us. We were in the grimmest part of a grimy city. And yet, as I walked on holding that confiding hand in mine and listening to that innocent voice, there came upon me a solemn sense of the presence of angels—the angels of these little children. The ground we trod

upon, the air we breathed—sordid and smoke-stained both—were sacred. The prattle of a little child in the busy marts of men brought the angels of God closer to me than silent meditation in perfect solitude.

We left them presently at their door, smiling and waving their hands to us so long as they could get our eye. As we went on, I mentioned my feelings to Brother Mark.

“Strange,” he commented. “I had precisely the same sensation. And now, the angels are gone.”

V

In a few minutes, we were standing at the door of Reardon’s home. It was a ramshackle frame structure of three stories. Of course, we knew very well that the Reardon family did not occupy the entire building. Things are not done that way—with a few notable exceptions—in St. Xavier parish in the twentieth century. In such a building as the one before us, there is the following classic division: first-story front, first-story back; second-story front, second-story back; third-story front, third-story back; and there is a family for each division. People who want a whole floor to themselves should move out of St. Xavier’s into Holy Cross; and if they desire an entire house should seek the classic sequestration of Walnut Hills.

We took our chance at the first-floor front and pulled the bell. Already, with a swiftness that astonished me, a crowd of children had gathered on the pavement, watching our movements with unconcealed interest.

“Say, Mister,” said a very dirty little boy in a very long overcoat and a very large hat, “that there door bell don’t ring.”

“The best way to get them,” said a slightly older youth, “is to bang on the door with a brick. They’s both of ’em deaf.”

“Does Frank Reardon live here?” asked the head Brother.

“No!” came the chorus.

Then there emerged from the motley group a girl of nine. She evidently belonged, as her speech and manner declared, to the girl’s department of St. Xavier School.

“Please, Brother,” she said, “I’ll show you the way.”

And show us she did—half-way back through a narrow passage, up an outer stairway to the second floor.

“Is this the place?” asked Brother Mark, pointing to a door that evidently belonged to the second floor back.

“Yes, Brother.”

Brother Mark was about to knock, when the little miss, in the artless and unstudied way peculiar to many of her class, threw the door open and called out,

“Frank Reardon! Here’s the Brothers coming after you.”

It was really very awkward for us; but what could we do? The room that met our eyes was the living room—by day at least—though in the far corner a suspicious looking article of furniture, not exactly “a chest of drawers by day,” was evidently destined to be converted into a bed by night.

In the center of the room was a rude table; upon the table was a pitcher, the contents of which was indicated by four glasses in various stages of depletion about the corners of the table. Seated around it were four young women. But they did not remain seated. Seeing us standing without, they scrambled to their feet, and while inviting us to “come in” and calling loudly for Frank, they edged by us, and disappeared down the stairway. Where they went, I do not know; but I have an idea that they first sought out the little Miss who threw open the door for us, and told her in plain and unvarnished terms what they thought of her present standing and future prospects.

Also, by some legerdemain, the pitcher and the four glasses, as we entered, were no longer on the table; and what became of them I know not to the present day. I learned later that two of the young women were Frank’s sisters—who did piece-work in a factory—and that the other two were “lady-friends.”

The quartet was hardly well on the stairway when from the back room emerged Frank, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and a large blue apron, telling its tale of many a washed dish, encircling his entire body.

“I was washing the dishes,” he said; then, raising his voice, “say, ma, here’s my teacher and the head Brother come to see us—come on in here; ma’s sick in bed.”

I was by this time somewhat bewildered. There was an abruptness and unconventionality about all the proceedings, beginning with the little girl’s throwing open the door, for which I was not prepared. Throughout it all, Brother Mark remained cool and smiling. He had visited in such neighborhoods before.

As Master Francis led the way, there was nothing for us but to follow him into the adjoining room; and a very small room it was. It led directly by another door into the kitchen. One window afforded a close and intimate view of a porch and stairway belonging to the next house—so close, so intimate that one could almost reach across by leaning out and stretching one’s arm. The

room was clean, and save for a chair, a washstand, a lamp on the mantle, and over the lamp a picture of the Sacred Heart, almost bare. On the bed lay a white-haired woman, her knotted hands upon the coverlet telling the story of chronic rheumatism. Pain and hardship had prematurely aged her face—a face gentle and long-suffering. She endeavored to raise herself up as we entered but Brother Mark protested.

“Just stay as you are,” he said.

Mrs. Reardon was plainly glad to see us.

“Which of you is the teacher of my boy?” she asked.

“There he is,” answered my Superior, pointing his hand at me.

“Oh, how glad I am to see you,” she cried. “You don’t know all you’ve done for my little boy. He was rough and wild till you got hold of him, and now he’s always talking of you. I suppose you know he’s had very hard times the last few months?”

“I suspected,” I replied, “that there was some sickness in the family.”

“Sickness! It’s been nothing else. Do you know that in October, besides myself being down, both my girls were sick, and my other boy who is working—he’s a little wild you know—disappeared and hasn’t been heard of till today. Poor little Francis here was cook and nurse and everything else.”

Francis was standing beside the bed, his arms akimbo, and looking alternately at his mother and the head Brother.

“What, Francis!” I cried, “can you cook?”

“I can cook and wash dishes and scrub and clean and go a-marketing,” answered Francis with simplicity.

“Can you cook a beefsteak?” I pursued.

“We never had none to cook. But I know how to do sausages. We had them twicet.”

“I am astonished,” I went on addressing the mother. “In October I noticed that Francis was falling back in his studies, but I had no idea that at his age he was acting as head of the family, trained nurse, general housekeeper, up-stairs girl and man-of-all-work. I—I’m astounded!”

“Yes, and for weeks we hadn’t a cent in the house. The boy couldn’t buy pencil or paper; we had no money even for bread. Somehow, Frank managed to do something or other after class, and if he hadn’t we’d have been thrown upon the Vincent de Paul.”

“Wonderful!” I cried out, and Brother Mark re-echoed my exclamation. “But why didn’t Frank let me know all about the conditions at home?”

“Indeed, I told him to tell you many a time; but he just couldn’t. He’s the dearest and best boy in the world, and a sick mother’s prayers will always go to the man who changed him—not that he didn’t always love his mother. Oh, he did—indeed, he did! But this year he has stayed up late and got up early to help me—God bless him and all his friends.”

“Shake hands, Frank,” said Brother Mark, “and after this, always tell your teacher about any sickness in your home.”

“Yes, Brother, I will,” said Frank, quite radiant. He was proud of his mother.

“And how are things with you now, Mrs. Reardon?” Brother Mark went on.

“I’ve just got good news. Harry, my oldest boy, has just written me. The poor fellow got restless and skipped to Detroit. He’s coming back to-morrow with a promise of a position at thirty-five dollars a month. Then, I can take my youngest girl out of the factory and keep her home, and little Francis will go to bed early and get his lessons and eat better meals with the money coming in. You’ll find, Brother John, that he’ll be the same little Francis that I started to school in September. I have been praying hard, and God has heard me; and my boy, my big boy, is coming home again to his old mother.”

The tears stole down her face—tears of present joy, reminiscent, too, of past suffering.

“He’s a good boy,” she continued, “only a little wild.”

We remained a few minutes longer. I had entered the second floor back with a sneer in my heart; I left it a wiser, and, I trust, humbler man. It was my first direct dealing with abject poverty. No wonder St. Francis almost apotheosizes “my lady poverty,” that St. Ignatius tells his followers to love it as a mother. Best of all, Francis Reardon, in his most degraded moments, as I had considered them, had been a hero, and he doesn’t know it to this day.

But I couldn’t even then get over the matter of that pitcher of beer and the four disappearing glasses. I mentioned my difficulty on the way home to Brother Mark.

“Beer is cheap,” he said. “It is the cheapest thing in the market. You don’t expect those girls to go automobiling, do you?”

“Brother, you are ironical.”

“I’m not. Perhaps, you expect them after eight or nine hours in the factory to go out and play lawn tennis; or spend the evening like their wealthier Christian sisters, in doing the Turkey Trot and dancing the Tango. A pitcher of beer is an amusement; and I dare say, bad though it be at times, it’s not so

dangerous as automobiling to the body and not near so dangerous as turkey-trotting to the soul. Brother John, it's the only amusement some poor people know of; and it's your business and mine as teachers to educate them up to something healthier and higher. There's less mischief in a pitcher of beer—one pitcher, mind you—than in most of the dances and novels and magazines now most popular."

My education was progressing too rapidly. The thought of beer as an amusement reduced me to silence.

VI

Two days later, I knew that the prodigal son had returned and that Master Francis had had his share of the fatted calf. He came to early Mass and with Fatty on one side and Hogarth on the other approached the Holy Table. It was the beginning for him of daily Communion.

I found on my desk that morning a somewhat withered apple, under it a note which read as follows:

"Dear Brother:

I thank you for your visit. I thank you for seeing my Ma and she likes you the same as I do. Here is my pledge. I solumny promis never to steal again, and I'm going to have no secrets. Ma says to tell you, and I will.

"Your friend,

FRANCIS REARDON."

December was a sort of golden age in the fourth grade. Harmony, friendliness, good order, hard study, true piety—a piety built largely upon the purity of heart that comes from daily Communion.

Francis was fast coming to the leadership of the class; within calling distance of Hogarth—who was constantly devising new societies—and a trifle ahead of Edward Stevens. Yet, the boy was at times nervous in his dealings with me. Gradually it dawned on me that he felt some doubt as to my trust in him. I had known him as a thief; could I look upon him as in the days of our early acquaintance?

I was puzzling for some time as to the best way to reassure him, when, unwittingly, Master John Hogarth gave me the proper key.

"Brother John," he said one afternoon, toward the close of class, "the kids want to get up a ball team in the spring, and we're going to get ready now. Will you be our president?"

“With pleasure.”

“And we’re all going to put in a penny a week, so’s to be ready to get suits and bats and balls. I guess I’m to be vice-president and secretary myself, and we’d like you to appoint a treasurer, some fellow who’ll be sure to take good care of the money.”

Quick as a flash, I saw my chance.

“I appoint Francis Reardon.”

There was applause, but I let it go on unchecked, for I was looking at Francis. He knew now that I trusted him and I knew at last my moral victory was complete.

A POINT OF HONOR

A POINT OF HONOR

I

ON commencement night, Harry Liscombe went forth from his home with a gay boutonnière in the lapel of his coat. His face was in keeping with the flowers. There was a bloom in his cheek, a brightness in his laughing eyes; and if he ever had experienced a care, time, like an absent minded bookkeeper, had failed to enter it on his sunny features.

There was just the least suspicion of a trip in Harry's buoyant step as he hastened along the street, whistling choice fragments from "Sweet Marie," "After the Ball," and another unspeakable melody of the day. Evidently Harry was happy. To him the commencement exercises presented no terrors. He was quite sure of the prize in Latin, and looked forward with confidence to obtaining premiums in two or three other branches. Moreover he was now, and for the first time, arrayed in all the splendor of long pants. The time was well chosen. On the one hand, his smaller playmates would admire and envy him; on the other, as there was to be no class till September, his college friends would have no opportunity of teasing him on his changed appearance. No wonder, then, that he did not actually trip; a sense of dignity comes with long pants, which, though intense, is not lasting.

Harry had gone some four squares when he turned into a quiet by-street, and going up the steps of a humble house, the third from the corner, rapped at the door.

"Come in, Harry," cried a voice.

"How did you know it was I?" asked Harry, as he opened the door, smiling expansively.

"I could tell your step in a procession—it's quick and light," answered the first speaker, a lad at least two years older than Harry, but sligher, paler and far more serious looking.

"Good evening, Mrs. Stuart," continued Harry, bowing to the mother of his

friend, who was seated close to a table lamp with a basket of needlework in her lap.

Mrs. Stuart nodded pleasantly and, after a few words, resumed her sewing.

“Where’s your button-hole bouquet?” continued Harry.

Dick Stuart shrugged his shoulders, and asked:

“Don’t I look brilliant enough?”

“You’ll pass in a crowd; but as you and I are going to walk together, we’d better correspond.”

Harry, as he spoke, took from his pocket a little paper package, which he carefully unfolded. It contained a boutonnière like his own, and a fragrant red rose.

“The rose is for you, Mrs. Stuart. I plucked it off father’s nicest rose bush while the gardener was chasing a dog off our lot. I say, Mrs. Stuart,” he added, while he presented her the flower, “you oughtn’t to sew at night; you’ll hurt your eyes. *My* mother doesn’t sew at night.”

“My eyes are quite good, thank you, Harry,” said Mrs. Stuart with a smile. She did not think it worth while intimating that a doubtful income of six hundred dollars compared with a certain one of ten thousand dollars made a considerable difference in the economy of a household.

“Harry’s right, mother,” put in Dick. “Your eyes aren’t near so good as you make them out to be. Sometimes you hold your sewing machines—fixings, I mean—within four inches of your face. You oughtn’t to sew much at night anyhow. And then, suppose, mother, I get that scientific medal.”

Dick stopped short. Harry, he noticed, had given a sudden start.

“But I musn’t count my chickens before they are hatched,” he added, with an apologetic look directed to Harry.

From that moment till they got out into the open air Harry was unmistakably ill at ease.

“Dick,” he began, as arm in arm they stepped briskly forward, “do you think that your chances are good for that scientific medal?”

“Well, if hard work counts for anything, I ought to stand a fair chance. I never worked for anything as I worked for that. Why, Harry, I read eight different books on the subject through, and took notes from all of them—in fact, I analyzed one of them from cover to cover. It cost me a month. I went over another of the books three times. Then I wrote out my essay five times, and I tell you I was dead tired when I got through.”

“I should think you were! Good gracious, Dick, what put it into your head

to work so hard?"

Dick hesitated for a moment.

"Well, I don't mind telling it to you, Harry, but you mustn't publish it. Last March I went to see a doctor, and he told me I was in danger of going into an incurable disease. He put me under treatment and a diet—especially a diet,"—Dick uttered his last words with fervent disgust, "and said that if I could manage to go to Waukesha this summer and put myself under the charge of some doctor or other there—I can't remember his name—I might be permanently cured. Now just two days before the doctor punched and pounded me, I got a letter from my uncle in Cincinnati, who's a very wealthy man, in which he offered to give me a full summer trip if I should win the scientific medal. My mother, you know, is very poor. Since father's death, two years ago, we've been trying to straighten our affairs, and haven't managed to do so yet. Now, Harry, do you understand?"

Did Harry understand? The light had gone from his eyes, the elasticity from his step, the flush from his cheek. He drew his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the moisture from his hands.

"Oh, how I hope you'll get it, Dick," he cried in a burst of fervor, more intense than the occasion and even his great friendship might seem to warrant.

Dick looked at Harry in surprise.

"I believe you, Harry," he said. "But you needn't get so excited about it. You seem to be more anxious for my success than I am. And I've gone too far myself. The fact is, I'm getting selfish in this matter. I've got to be so anxious that I feel ashamed of myself; and of late I've been praying hard not to be too eager. But eager as I am, Harry, just the same if I don't get it, I hope you may. In fact, I wouldn't worry a bit, if you——"

"Don't you talk any more of that nonsense; don't you hope anything of the sort," bawled Harry fiercely.

"Why, old fellow, what in the world's the matter with you?"

When this question was put, they were passing Holy Trinity Church.

"Suppose we walk in here for a moment," said Harry, "and say a little prayer, first, that you may get the medal, second, that I may not, in any case."

"I'll not agree to that," cried Dick warmly. "What do you take me for? I'll pray that either you or I may get it."

"Look here, Dick Stuart," said Harry, catching his companion's arm in a grip that was painful, and lowering his voice to a whisper, "you and I have been partners for the last four or five weeks, haven't we?"

"Yes," assented Dick, struggling not to wince under Harry's grip.

"And I like you better than any fellow I have ever met, and I believe you like me——"

"Better than any fellow *I've* ever met," broke in Dick.

"Well now, if you want to do me a favor, pray that I may not get the medal."

"All right, Harry—that is, I won't pray that you may get it."

"But you must pray that I don't."

"Very well; but I fear I won't want to be heard. Anyhow, I don't understand."

"I don't want you to understand," returned Harry, "but pray for all you're worth."

The two then entered the church.

II

The moment had come for which Dick had been so eagerly and Harry so anxiously waiting. They were seated next each other, Dick's right hand clasped in Harry's left—"that's nearest my heart," Harry had said.

"The gold medal for the scientific essay, subject 'Oxygen,' is awarded to Henry Liscombe; honorably mentioned, Richard Stuart."

Harry uttered a gasp which deepened into a groan; his face flushed scarlet, Dick's was ashen.

"I'm glad you've got it, Harry," he whispered. "It might have come hard on me, but our visit at Holy Trinity settled that. Why don't you go up?"

"I can't," gasped Harry.

Even then the Vice-President was running his eyes over the students to discover the whereabouts of the prize-winner.

"Go on—you'll create a scene," urged Dick.

"Is Harry Liscombe present?" the Vice-President inquired, so modulating his voice that it might reach only the students directly in front of the stage.

Then Harry arose and, amid generous applause, received the medal.

But instead of returning to his seat he made his way down the hall and, once outside the door, dashed down the stairs and into the street, on reaching which his first act was to tear the medal from his coat.

"Oh, what shall I do?" he cried out. "I'm a thief, and not only a thief, but I've robbed my best friend!"

III

Three months before commencement, Harry had gone to his room in a very bad humor. His father and he had had a slight misunderstanding; or, to put it better, they had come to an understanding. Harry, on that particular day, was for going to a show.

"Have you finished your scientific essay?" Mr. Liscombe asked.

"No, father; I haven't begun it. The fact is, I don't care about competing."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Oh, I don't care about it. I'm all right in my other studies but I'm not up in science. Besides, I'm the youngest boy in the chemistry class, and I don't stand the least chance."

"I'm sorry you don't care, Harry; but at the same time I do care very much. You are hardly a little boy now, and your not caring about this or that is only a pleasant way of saying that you are lazy. Now, my boy, I told you some months ago that I wanted you to compete for that gold medal, and I thought my wish would be enough."

"I intended to go in for it, father."

"You always mean well, Harry, I'm sure; but you must *do* well, too. Now, put the show out of your head, go to your room and begin your essay. The show is to be here for a week yet. When you've finished your essay, come to me."

Harry obeyed, but smarted under the obedience.

Sitting down at his study table, he ran his fingers through his hair, took up a lead pencil, which he sharpened with elaborate care, and finally began his uncongenial task with such glittering generalities on oxygen as might be expected of a tolerably well-read lad of fifteen. Within ten minutes he had composed quite a fair introduction, which, after the manner of youthful writers, was general, sweeping and vague. Then Harry came to a pause. To go further, accurate knowledge must be brought into play; to get this accurate knowledge meant hours of study. Harry had come to an intellectual deadlock. He sighed, threw his pencil savagely upon the table and began pacing the floor. His brow was furrowed, his hair stood up in a variety of directions—he looked like a student on the eve of some great discovery. As a matter of fact, his mind was a blank.

"May I come in?" said a light voice without.

"Yes; do please, Mary. I'm in the depths."

His sister, a girl of seventeen, entered.

“Why, Harry, what has happened? Is it an inspiration? Has an idea come to you?”

“No, Mary, it’s the other way. All my ideas have left me.”

“Oh, it’s much the same. What’s the trouble?”

“Father says I’ve got to write that old scientific essay about oxygen. I’ve scribbled off an introduction; but I don’t see how I can go a single sentence further.”

“Oh, is it about oxygen, Harry?”

“Yes, it is; and I wish I’d never heard of the old stuff.”

“I’ve got just what you want. There’s an odd number of a scientific magazine in my room with a fine article on ‘The Air.’ Most of it is about oxygen.”

“You have! That will save me hours of running through text-books. Mary, you’re the right kind of a sister—”

“Which means that you want me to run off and get you the magazine.”

Harry grinned.

“I didn’t intend to put it so—so—”

“Brutally,” suggested Mary.

“Exactly. But if you bring it to me, I’ll fix up that essay in a jiffy, and then I’ll take you to the show.”

Curiously enough, this young lady was not insensible to the charms of a show. She hastened away and returned promptly with the coveted magazine, and then left her brother to his solitude.

Harry read the article carefully, slapped his thigh at the end, and cried out:

“Just the thing to a dot; it’s short and clear.”

Having given the article a second reading, he composed himself to his work, and, not without labor, wrote a few sentences. But the words failed to come readily, and, in a fit of impatience, he began to copy word for word from the printed page. To do Harry justice, he was not thinking of securing the gold medal. His one point was to get the disagreeable task off his hands, and so go to the show. Copying he found to be quite an easy matter. In a few hours he had, with some judicious and time-saving omissions, transferred the portion bearing upon oxygen from the magazine to his paper. Then he threw in a few cheap flourishes by way of conclusion, and signed his pseudonym. Strangely enough, his conscience, meantime, was practically asleep. It never once occurred to him that his essay might gain the medal.

In due time he handed it in; in due time he went with his sister to the show;

of the latter he retained vivid recollections, but his essay slipped from his memory almost as though it had not been.

Some five or six weeks before commencement, his intimacy with Dick Stuart began. Morally, Dick was a character strong and sweet. He was studious, conscientious, kind, just. In his company Harry's dormant conscience soon began to show signs of an awakening. Dick's sense of honor communicated itself to Harry; and, as the days went by, the voice of conscience became imperative. Finally, two weeks before the ending of the school year, Harry went to the Vice-President.

"Father," he said, "I should be obliged to you, if you were to allow me to withdraw my scientific essay."

The Vice-President was unusually busy at the time; he failed to observe the distress in the boy's face.

"Too late, Harry," he said, checking off the names of late-comers as he spoke. "Everything has been settled already."

Harry withdrew with a lighter heart; he had done *something*, at any rate, and as to getting the medal, the thought had not as yet entered his head.

But when on commencement night Dick Stuart gave word to his hopes and fears, it flashed upon Harry that his own borrowed essay would in all likelihood be considered the better of the two. It was a sickening moment. When the prize was awarded him his feelings were agonizing. A thief! robbing his best friend of an honor so well earned, and, in consequence, of a trip upon which depended, in all probability, the usefulness of a promising and beautiful life.

Harry hurried home from the hall, locked himself in his room, and gazed about him wildly. His eye rested, at last, upon his little brother sleeping peacefully, his slender hands clasped above the white coverlet, the beads of the Blessed Virgin about his neck. Long and intently Harry gazed. There was not a line, nor a wrinkle, nor shade of trouble upon the sleeper's face. Peace and purity and love seemed to have set their gracious signet upon every feature. He looked as an angel might look, were it to take a human form. Truth and simplicity and innocence lent a spiritual beauty to the sleeping child. Three years ago the gazer had been just such a one as his little brother—and now Harry burst into tears. The first passionate outbreak of grief was very soon over, but it left him upon his knees; and there he knelt far into the night.

IV

On the next morning Harry took his father aside.

“Father, you intended to give me a trip East didn’t you?”

“Yes, Harry; your mother and sister and uncle are to start for New York on July 6, and you are to go with them. You deserve a trip, my boy,” he added kindly and with a beaming smile.

“No, father; I do not. I want you to let me off that trip.”

Mr. Liscombe looked sharply at his boy and saw that there was a great trouble upon him.

“What’s the matter, Harry?”

“I’ve done something that I’m ashamed of, father. Don’t ask me about it now. I’ll tell you some day. First of all, I want to make reparation. I need money for that.”

There was a dimness in Harry’s eyes, and, as he spoke, a sigh broke from him which he could not repress. Mr. Liscombe had fine tact. He respected the *soul* of his boy. He knew that there were recesses there into which God alone might penetrate uninvited.

“I trust you fully, Harry. You can tell me or not—as you please, and when you please.”

Harry never so loved his father as he loved him at this moment. He said nothing; but his silence was eloquent.

“How much money do you want, Harry?”

“It’s a big sum, father.”

“First of all, I make you a present of the money your Eastern trip would have required—say, one hundred and twenty dollars.”

“Thank you, father; but I need about eighty dollars more.”

“Very good; call down at my office to-day, and it shall be paid you in any way you want it.”

“But, father, if you please, I should like to earn that eighty dollars. I’ve done wrong, and I’d like to do a little penance. Let me go to work.”

Mr. Liscombe paused before replying.

“Well, I’d like to think over that. I want my boy to have a rest. I’ll turn the matter over in my mind and let you know my conclusion later. Call for the money this afternoon, and then perhaps I may be ready to decide as to whether you should go to work or not.”

In the course of the hour the President of St. Dunstan’s college heard a knock at his door.

“Come in,” he cried, carefully slipping a sheet of paper over the open

pages of a magazine which he had been reading with knitted brows.

"Ah, Harry," he exclaimed, "I was just thinking of you."

"Father," said Harry, panting and blushing, "let me get it out at once. Here's that gold medal. I stole it. It isn't mine."

"Sit down, Harry, and tell me all about it."

The American boy is delightfully frank. Harry, in truth, delivered a plain unvarnished tale.

"One question, Harry," said the President gently, on Harry's coming to a pause. "When you copied from this—" here the President slipped away the paper and revealed the magazine open at one of the pages from which Harry had copied—"did you do so with the intention of winning the medal?"

"No, sir," cried Harry.

"But didn't it occur to you that you *might* win it?"

"No, Father; the only thing I had on my mind was to get that essay off and go to the show."

The President smiled.

"Harry, you've taken a great weight off my mind. Just a moment ago I was tempted to judge you harshly. It shocked me to think that one whose name for honor stood so high should deliberately cheat for a prize. But your explanation takes away the worst feature, and your confession makes up for much. If you had copied with the intention of getting the medal, then you would indeed be a thief. But you had not even in a confused and obscure way such an intention."

"That's true, Father, but all the same I've done a great wrong. As a matter of fact, I have the honor which belongs to Dick Stuart. I can't make up for that."

"No; you can never make up for that," said the President gravely, "and it is well that you should realize it. I think, Harry, that God has been watching over you in a special way. Had you not gained that medal, your sense of honor would have been blunted; had you gained it, but not over one who happens to be your best friend and to need it very much, you might have stifled your conscience and gone on in a path which certainly would not be the one which your father, a man of stainless honor, has followed. But now, on the very threshold of dishonor, you are driven back. Harry, you have reason to thank God. Show your thankfulness by resolving, from now on, never to do the least thing tainted with even the suspicion of dishonor."

"I do resolve, sir," said Harry, very erect and very earnest. "I see it all. God has been very good to me. And now I'm going down to my father. I'll give him the whole story straight."

“Do, my boy; and I doubt not that out of this evil God will draw great good.”

Harry went away happy. His father took the matter as the President had taken it. He congratulated his son on his courage in confessing.

“Now in regard to your working, Harry,” continued Mr. Liscombe, “I’ve come to the conclusion that you are right. You should make reparation. I already know all about Dick Stuart, and I happen to have the address of his rich uncle, who does business with me. And now I want you to write the uncle a confidential letter, confessing your fault and enclosing the two hundred dollars.”

“Oh, I see!” cried Harry in delight. “I am to get the uncle to give Dick the trip, just as if he had gained the medal, so that Dick won’t know I’ve anything to do with it.”

“Exactly, and——”

But Mr. Liscombe paused. Harry had flown to a desk, seized paper and pen and begun writing furiously.

“Oh, I say, father, what about that job?” cried Harry, stopping in the middle of the letter.

“It’s secret service.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“You’re to go to Waukesha too. Your work is to make Dick Stuart happy for two months.”

As Harry here spilled a bottle of ink over the desk the conversation was interrupted.

“If you wish to express your happiness, go outside,” continued Mr. Liscombe. “Well, it’s a good work for you. You *are* a cheerful young man, and you have a knack for keeping young Stuart on the go, which no one else has. Your services will be as good as the doctor’s, and since you have wronged your friend in one way, you must right him in another.”

Dick and Harry had a jolly time. Harry was as successful a nurse, I dare say, as ever accompanied a patient to Waukesha.

Dick returned the picture of health; Harry returned the soul of honor. Dick is healthy and strong to this day; and Harry is—and, I trust, ever will be—a knight without fear and without reproach.

ROUND CHRISTMAS FOOTLIGHTS

ROUND CHRISTMAS

FOOTLIGHTS

I. THE STORY OF DAVID

OH, Mr. Murdock, the angel told me to tell you that he can't come to rehearsal to-day, because he's got a black eye."

"Go and get him anyhow," said Mr. Murdock, in decided tones; "an angel with a black eye can announce the good tidings just as well as not. Tell him that the author of the play is here and is anxious to see the whole rehearsal."

Harry Verdin, who had just delivered the angel's health bulletin, glanced curiously at the stranger, who, it appeared, was the playwright, and then sped away skipingly in quest of the recalcitrant angel, while the four remaining young gentlemen stared hard and artlessly at the blushing author.

It was three days before Christmas. For several weeks Mr. Murdock had been training six little lads of his class to perform a simple drama, called "The Meeting at Bethlehem." To understand the events which I propose to relate, some idea of the plot must be given.

This is the argument as it appeared on the program:

The play supposes that on the night of the Nativity the Babe of Bethlehem calls to His side not only the shepherds, but also some innocent children.

A Jewish lad and his lame brother, led by the mysterious influence of a star, have reached a spot near the stable of Bethlehem. The charmed stillness of the night, the songs of angels in the midnight air, the apparition of Uriel—all combine to impress upon their minds that something divine has happened, or is about to happen. This surmise is confirmed by two lads, one a Greek, the other a Roman, who have come directly from the crib of Bethlehem, and who declare that they have just seen God in the form of an Infant. Despite the incredulity of his two companions, Ariel, the young cripple, believes, makes an

act of faith in the divinity of the Child, and straightway leaps up cured.

Presently the hatred which the Jewish youths had thus far shown the Gentiles is dissipated, and urged on by the persuasions of the little Ariel, who seems to have caught at once the spirit of peace and good will which Christ newly born had brought to earth, the children effect a reconciliation and depart, at the message of the angel Uriel, to adore the Word Incarnate.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BENONI,	}	Jews	Master	Harry Verdin.
ARIEL,			"	Clarence Collingwood.
MANAHAN,			"	George Ring.
URIEL, <i>an angel</i>			"	David Reade.
FAUSTINUS	}	Gentiles	"	Thomas Farrar.
ARISTOS			"	John Steele.

Mr. Murdock, the young scholastic who had undertaken the production of this play, was a character worthy of study. His influence over boys, whether large or small, was extraordinary. The secret of this influence it was hard to find. He was reticent, quiet, and, it would seem, most unobservant. He appeared to know little or nothing about his boys. And yet he frequently brought things to rights without seeming to know that anything had been wrong.

To give an instance. Early in the school year Mr. Murdock was explaining the formation of the Latin verb.

"There are four conjunctions in Latin," he was saying. "The first is determined by the fact that the present infinitive ends in *are*, as *amare*, to love; the second has the infinitive in *ēre* long, as *delēre*, to destroy; the third has the infinitive in *ēre* short—"

Just then a "Giant" fire-cracker exploded. There was a promise of great confusion, as a dozen youths started from their seats. Mr. Murdock's hand went out with a gesture which settled them all back again.

"As," he continued, still holding the gesture, "*explodēre*, to explode."

And then the boys could not make up their minds as to whether the teacher had borrowed his example from the event or not. With their sharp, eager, young eyes, they scanned his face to see whether a laugh would be in order. But Mr. Murdock's face could express anything or nothing, as he pleased; and on this occasion it expressed nothing. Before they could resolve their doubts, the teacher went on with his remarks; and for three days after it was held by

certain of the class that Mr. Murdock had not noticed the explosion at all.

Mr. Murdock was a man of power.

The young gentleman who had set off the fire-cracker, though mystified, was not crushed. He had been sent to college against his will, and he had made up his mind to make it unpleasant for his teacher. After the fire-cracker episode he stuck the nib of a pen in his desk, and, at convenient, and, in his judgment, safe intervals, extracted archaic music from it by flipping it with his thumb-nail.

The sound was clear and distinct, yet everyone was certain that Mr. Murdock failed to hear it.

Presently the musician gave up in disgust. Then he took from his pocket a tiny pill-box filled with the heads of matches, and, with the circumspection characteristic of such youths, scattered them along the aisle between the rows of benches. And so, when recess time came, most of the boys went off with a report.

During the hour after recess, this disorderly lad hummed, at first like a blue-bottle fly, but, meeting with no attention, finally with a view to harmonic effects. His rendition of "Annie Laurie," though defective in the matter of time, was, upon the whole, melodious.

Everybody, apparently, save Mr. Murdock, listened with wonder.

By dinner-time it was held, as a probable opinion, that Mr. Murdock was losing his hearing.

At noon the young scapegrace, instead of going directly to the lunch-room, sauntered alone into the yard. His movements lacked the vivacity which should distinguish his tender age. There were two reasons for this lack of vivacity: First, he was debating whether Mr. Murdock was preternaturally foolish or supernaturally wise.

Secondly—

"David," came a voice from a window looking out upon the yard, "why aren't you at lunch?"

"Because, sir, I forgot to bring my lunch-basket." Which was the second reason for his lack of vivacity.

"Come in here, David, I want to see you," continued Mr. Murdock, with a smile. With vivacity reduced to *nil*, David obeyed.

"He's found me out," David soliloquized with a gloomy brow, "and now I'm going to catch it."

"Come in, David; it's a lucky thing that I have some cakes and fruit to-day. I found them in my room when I came from class. Some friend left them here,

but forgot to leave his name. Sit down and eat what you can; then take a rest and eat some more.”

David put himself on the defensive at once.

“I don’t want anything, sir, thank you.”

“I hear, David,” continued the professor, not seeming to notice the answer, “that your mamma is sick.”

“Yes, sir,” said David softening—what lad will not soften when he thinks of his mother?—“she’s down with fever.”

“I’m so sorry. Tell her that I’m coming to see her as soon as I can make time. I met your mother at the beginning of the year, and I liked her. You see, David, she was so fond of you.”

“Thank you, sir,” said David, softening still more, and becoming polite in spite of himself. “She often talks of you, sir.”

“And how is your little sister?” continued Mr. Murdock.

“First rate, sir; she sings all day.”

“Does she sing Annie Laurie?”

Dave shot a look at Mr. Murdock. There was nothing in the teacher’s face but an expression of kindest interest.

“Yes, sir; she’s always singing Scotch airs.”

“They are my favorites, too,” said Mr. Murdock, as he rummaged in his desk. “Here,” he continued, “is a picture of St. Cecilia for Ella. Tell her that St. Cecilia is the patron of music.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Dave with a bow.

“And now, Dave, sit down and eat.”

Dave yielded this point.

“How do you like going to school here?” continued Mr. Murdock, as Dave began with a huge orange.

“I don’t like it at all,” answered Dave, determined to make another struggle against being carried away by this stream of kindness.

“Don’t you? Where did you go to school before you came here?”

“To a public school—the Stoddard—I went there for three years and I liked it, and I want to go back again.”

Dave finished his orange with a look of disgust, and taking up another, peeled it, with tragic gloom upon his countenance.

“I don’t wonder that you want to go back,” continued Mr. Murdock. “If I were in your place, I suppose I should feel just the same way myself.”

Dave forgot to scowl as he stared at his teacher.

"There are nice boys going to the Stoddard," Mr. Murdock added.

"You bet there are!" said Dave emphatically.

"Precisely; and you've come to like them very much, and you don't care about being separated from your old playfellows."

"That's just it," cried Dave with enthusiasm; "all my chums go to that school."

"I don't blame you a bit for feeling bad, Dave. It's a sign that you have a good heart. If you were a cruel and selfish boy, you wouldn't mind. But, if you wait for a while, you will find that there are some good boys going here. After a few months you will have many friends, and then you won't mind, and you will be happy; and, best of all, you'll please your mother, who is so anxious for you to attend school here."

"I didn't think of it that way," said Dave, attacking a third orange, and smiling radiantly.

"Try to think of it. And another thing, Dave; don't complain about school while your mother is ill. If she thinks that you are unhappy she will be unhappy too. You see she is such a fond mother."

"I'll not say another word till she's well. Say, these oranges are immense."

"Take another."

"I think I will."

And he did. Then he turned to the apples, and finally consented to regale himself with a huge slice of fruit cake.

"And now, Dave," said Mr. Murdock, laying a hand on the lad's shoulders and walking with him to the door, "next time you go to the chapel say a 'Hail Mary' for me, please. That will more than pay me for this lunch."

Dave went straight to the chapel, said the "Hail Mary" and many other prayers. It was the first time since coming to college that he had paid such a visit. He prayed well, for he was softened and humbled. Dave was not a bad boy; but, if he had been, I dare say he would have come away justified. Dave was conquered.

He was also a very sick boy that night; but that has nothing to do with this story.

Now Dave was the angel with the black eye.

II. THE UNDRESS REHEARSAL

The angel, holding a hand over his right eye, came clattering in with: "Where's the man who wrote this play?"

The playwright almost blushed as several tiny fingers were pointed at him.

"Why didn't you give me more to say?" demanded the angel with a conciliatory smile.

"All you've got to do," remarked Cecil Collingwood, the cripple of the play, "is to try and look pretty; and it will be hard enough for you to do that."

"What's the matter with your eye?" queried the author.

"It's blacked; I got it in a foot-ball rush; but I made five yards on that eye, and the fellow who gave it to me didn't have any wind in him when I got off him."

In his tones there were sorrow for the eye, triumph for the windlessness of its giver.

The angel here took Cecil Collingwood aside, and said, pointing with his crescent thumb at the author:—

"Gee; *he* doesn't look like a man that writes plays."

"How do men look that write plays?" asked Cecil with interest.

"Oh, they look—they look different. Say, Mr. Murdock, how do you expect a fellow to talk with a black eye?"

"It's not impossible," said the trainer. "Some people use their eyes too much when they talk."

"Say, Dave," whispered Cecil, reverting to the author, "he looks amiable."

"I'll bet our teacher could write a better play if he wanted to," returned the angel. "What's the sense of one angel? Our teacher would have turned out fifty."

The playwright, meantime, was watching the boys. He noticed that they divided into two groups. These groups changed constantly, and yet Harry Verdin and Tommy Farrar were never seen together. They were all lively youngsters, and rattled away boy-fashion, with an occasional interchange of pokes and digs, and the throwing about of hats and caps. They were quite natural.

At length the rehearsal was begun. Verdin, as Benoni, helped his crippled brother Ariel to a seat upon what was supposed to be a stone, and the two fell to talking of the strange and beautiful night.

They had not gone far in the dialogue when Tommy Farrar seated himself beside the one spectator.

"Say, mister," he began with a friendly smile, "are you going to write any

more plays?"

"Perhaps," was the modest answer.

"Well, if you do, bring in a lot of Indians."

"How are you getting along with this play?"

"Pretty well; I'm the Roman youth, and I've got to come on and tell Verdin, the fellow that plays Benoni, that I have seen the Infant Saviour born in a stable, and that He has come to bring peace. I tell him the Babe is the Messiah. Verdin's an old Jew, you know, and won't believe. He hates me because I'm a Roman, and when I offer to shake hands he refuses, the old Sheeny! After a while his little brother, Ariel, who is a pious little Jew, gets cured by a miracle, and then Benoni apologizes to me for having been so rude, and we become friends. I don't like to act with Verdin."

"Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

The angel now seated himself next to Tommy, and hinted that the play would not be "near so dead" if the writer had introduced a foot-ball game.

"Where's that angel?" called out Mr. Murdock from behind the scenes. "Come on here, angel, and do your part."

The angel hopped upon the stage, and with heavy and long strides advanced to the middle. Benoni, Ariel and Manahan fell upon their knees.

"Oh, Mr. Angel," cried kneeling Cecil Collingwood, clasping his hands, and turning his blue eyes first upon the angel, and then seraphically towards heaven, "What a beautiful black eye you've got."

"Behold," bellowed the angel, glaring savagely at Cecil, "I bring you tidings of great joy—stop your monkeying, will you, Cecil Collingwood, or it will be the worse for you—say, Mr. Murdock, I can't act with a black eye."

"If there were angels like you in heaven," observed the unruffled trainer, "I shouldn't care about going there. Try that scene over. Take shorter and slower steps, and don't announce the joyful tidings as though you were preaching a sermon on hell."

After five painful efforts, the angel succeeded in satisfying the patient Mr. Murdock.

The play now proceeded briskly, the quarrel scene between Verdin and Farrar being really good.

But when the time of reconciliation arrived, the action became at once unsatisfactory. Manahan, it is true, and Aristos clasped hands cordially, and with great naturalness. But Benoni and Faustinus did not shake hands at all.

They made a feint; their hands drew close together, but there was no clasp. Their cordiality was congealed.

“Mr. Murdock,” said the author, “this thing won’t do at all. Farrar and Verdin haven’t the least idea of their parts. They’ve missed the spirit of it altogether.”

“Have they?”

“Of course; didn’t you notice that they did not shake hands?”

“Didn’t they?”

“You must have noticed it. The reconciliation was the iciest thing I ever witnessed.”

Mr. Murdock paused for a moment.

“Let it go for the present,” he said: “I think it will be all right.”

The author went away vexed.

“I’m going to get a mill-stone,” he muttered, “and I shall try to find out whether Mr. Murdock can discover the hole.”

For he had seen at a glance that Verdin and Farrar were not on speaking terms.

As a matter of fact, these two young gentlemen had not spoken in many months.

“Isn’t it queer that Mr. Murdock has never noticed the way those two fellows look at each other in different directions?” the angel had commented. “There are some things Mr. Murdock doesn’t notice at all.”

But two rehearsals were remaining before the public performance, and yet Mr. Murdock, despite the bad showing, went his way quite contentedly.

How much did he know?

There was no man who could have answered that question.

III. THE QUARREL

Sing, O my Muse, the wrath of Tommy Farrar against Harry, son of John Verdin, wholesale hardware merchant, which impeded the progress of the Christmas play, and promised to set so many things awry.

Pius X. had a great deal to do with this quarrel.

Shortly after Tommy Farrar was newly breeched, he was sent to the boys’ department of St. Vincent’s Academy, and seated next to his intimate friend, Harry Verdin. They got on together nicely for some time. One day, however,

in a burst of youthful vanity, Verdin said to Farrar:—

“Oh, you ought to go out West; then you’d be brave. I’ve been out West, and I’ve seen real Indians with their paint on.”

“Did they have tomahawks?”

“Of course, and pipes of peace. And one of them shook hands with me. You never shook hands with an Indian. If you were to see a real live Indian, you’d run for your life.”

As Verdin was speaking Farrar’s face had lighted up.

“Pshaw,” he said, “Talk about shaking hands with an Indian! I’ve done better than that—I’ve kissed the Pope!”

“What!” cried Verdin.

“That’s just what. When I was about four years old, mamma and papa took me to Europe. We went to see the Pope, who lives there, and he was all in white, and was smiling. Mamma and papa knelt down, and kissed his slipper. Then mamma told me to kneel down too. I was only a baby, you know, and didn’t have any sense; and so I began to pout. Then mamma got red in the face, and looked awful scared, especially when I said: ‘I won’t kiss the Pope’s toe.’ Then the Pope laughed and caught me in his arms, and raised me to his face, and kissed me; and then *I kissed him back*, and don’t you forget it, Harry Verdin, *I kissed the Pope back*. And he looked so kind and good, that when he set me down I got on my knees on my own account and kissed *both* his toes. And mamma says that when I got up the Pope blessed me with tears in his eyes. Talk about shaking hands with an Indian—pshaw!”

Verdin mastered his astonishment, and said:—

“Maybe it’s as much to shake hands with an Indian as to kiss the Pope.”

“What!” bawled Farrar, “Harry Verdin, you’re a heathen and a republican!”

“I’m as good a Catholic as you are.”

“You’re not; a boy who talks about an Indian as if he were Pope, ought to be fired out of the Church. I’m going to ask Sister about it.” And Farrar rushed over to Sister Mary in great excitement.

“Sister, Harry Verdin says he’d rather shake hands with an Indian than kiss the Pope.”

“I didn’t say any such thing,” sputtered Harry, “I said maybe.”

“Sister, which is right?” pursued Farrar.

“It’s a greater privilege even to *see* the Pope than to shake hands with the greatest Indian chief on the plains.”

For the remainder of that year Harry felt that there was something wanting in his life. O, for a chance to kiss the Pope. Alas, his baby days were over.

In the summer following Harry went to Europe. He was gone for two months. On reaching home he hastened at once to Tommy's house, and burst into his friend's room in a glow of excitement.

"How are you Tommy?" he bawled, as he caught Farrar's hand. "I'm even with you now; I've been to Europe, and kissed the Blarney Stone. Yah! Talk about kissing the Pope. Kissing the Blarney Stone is out of sight."

Tommy was so rejoiced to see his chum after their long separation, that he allowed the question to pass for the present.

But it came up again—in season and out of season. Tom and Harry gave some thought and much voice to their varying views, and, as commonly happens, the more they discussed the matter the more each became fixed in his own opinion.

One day they fell upon the vexed question in the presence of some of their school-mates. Their auditors seemed to exercise an irritating influence. From words they came to blows, and when they were at length separated, Tom had a swollen lip and Harry a bleeding nose.

From that day they went no more together, and when they chanced to meet they passed on with averted faces. Many months had gone by; together they went from school to college, and yet the breach was wide as ever.

Then they found themselves obliged to face each other day after day in preparation for the Christmas performance.

IV. DETECTED IN KINDNESS

At six o'clock on Christmas eve, Harry Verdin was seated at the supper table. Contrary to his custom he ate with much deliberation. He gave a sigh of relief as his brother Louie left the table; another, as his little sister followed suit. Then he looked wistfully at Alice, his senior by two years. She was dawdling, according to her amiable wont, and evidently in no hurry.

"I say, Alice," he at length remarked in a burst of inspiration; "did you see my costume for the play to-morrow night?"

"No; has it come?" asked Alice breathlessly.

"It's a *bird*," said Harry solemnly. "I've spread it on my bed; but as soon as I'm through my supper, I'm going to take it down to the college, to put it—"

There was no need of finishing the sentence; Alice had disappeared, and the sounds of a very hasty upstairs going were unmistakable.

“Pa and ma,” began Harry impressively, “I’m going to confession right after supper.”

As his parents were prepared for this step, they evinced no surprise.

“And I’m going to turn over a new leaf,” he added.

“That’s good, my dear,” his mother observed.

“I’ve been going wrong for a long time.”

Mr. and Mrs. Verdin looked at their son with awakening interest.

“The reason I’m telling you all this is because I want your help. I’m in a box. You see it’s this way: Tommy Farrar and I had a fight ever so long ago.”

“I remember the fact distinctly,” said Mr. Verdin.

“I can see your face now, as it looked after that quarrel, my dear,” added the mother.

“Yes; but there’s something that you don’t know. Ever since that fight Tommy and I have not been on speaking terms.”

Mrs. Verdin looked meaningfully at Mr. Verdin; his eyes were fixed upon the table-cloth.

“That was wrong, Harry,” said Mr. Verdin, in a constrained voice.

“I guess so, sir; but I managed some way or other to keep my conscience a-going all the same till lately. You see Tommy and I act together in this Christmas play, where all the talk is about peace and good-will and brotherly love. It says that Christ was born to draw us all together, and make us all brothers. Then there’s a part where Tom and I have to shake hands and change from enemies to friends. We can’t do that part a little bit. At first I didn’t mind the play. But the more I practiced the more I felt that if Christ came to bring peace and love, I was a pretty poor sort of a Christian. The last few days I haven’t felt as though I could go to Communion, unless I made up with Tommy. So I’ve got to do it, and I want you to help me.”

Mrs. Verdin rose from her place, and kissed her boy; there was a suspicious film in her eyes.

“Harry,” said the father in tones at once soft and strange, “I shall be glad to help you in any way I can. It is wrong and sad for little boys to cherish spites.”

“It isn’t spite, exactly, I think, papa. I still like Tom first rate; but I don’t care about trying to make up. I’m ashamed to. Now here’s the way I’m going to get out of it. I want to make Tom a Christmas present; a silver watch would be just the thing. Most of the fellows in our class have watches. I know from some of the other fellows that Tom is awful anxious to get one. He was expecting one all along this Christmas; the angel—”

"I beg your pardon?" put in Mr. Verdin.

"I mean Dave Reade, you know. He plays an angel, and we call him by that nickname because he's so unlike an angel. Well, Dave told me that Tom was blue because his mother told him he couldn't get his watch just yet."

Mr. Verdin took a roll of bills from his pocket, and counted out a sum that made Harry's eyes dance.

Harry took the money, and disappeared. He should have made a speech of thanks; but the fact is he did not. And yet neither father nor mother noticed the omission.

"My dear," said Mrs. Verdin, "Harry has unwittingly read you a sermon."

"I don't see that; with Harry and Tom the whole cause of their quarrel was a bit of foolishness. But with Tommy's father and myself it is a serious case—a matter of justice. I'm not going to pay that man's bills. According to my view, the debt is wholly his. He called me a swindler—I can't forget that."

"But, dear, he has arguments on his side; he thinks you're in the wrong, and so do some of your best friends. Besides, even if he did call you a swindler, he was very much excited; and you hinted that he, your life-long friend, was a thief."

"So he is—pretty near it, at least, according to my way of looking at it. At any rate the thing has gone too far; I can't come down with any self-respect from the position I took; and I know that he won't give in. So there's an end of it."

"Your case is much the same as Harry's then. Harry admitted that he couldn't bring himself to try to make up. It's a question of pride. You told me the other day that Mr. Farrar is now in financial difficulties. It will be a sad Christmas for him. His money is going, and he has lost his life-long friend."

"It was his own fault," said Mr. Verdin in harsh tones. "If it were not for our quarrel, I would help him in a minute."

"And yet, dear," said Mrs. Verdin, in her most persuasive accents, "you and he were such good friends, and you break up your friendship all because of a beggarly three hundred dollars. He is in distress now, John; it would be so magnanimous of you to make the first advances."

Mr. Verdin took up the evening paper.

"You don't understand business," he remarked.

"Perhaps not; but I do understand that in most quarrels both parties are in the wrong, and I also know that when our Saviour came upon earth, He came to bring peace and love to business men too."

Mr. Verdin was now deeply engrossed in his evening paper. The wife

sighed; there was no more to be said.

One hour later Harry Verdin, wrapped in an ulster which reached far below his knickerbockers, his head down in protection against biting wind and stinging sleet, and holding in his gloved right hand a tiny package, was making his way bravely and cheerfully toward Tommy Farrar's house. It was his intention to deliver to the servant at the door the package, carefully addressed to "Tommy Farrar, with love from Harry," and then hurry away. As yet he dared not face Tom. But he could easily imagine Tommy's joy, and he reveled in the imagining thereof.

"I'll bet Tom and I will be friends for life," he soliloquized, and absorbed in this pleasant reflection he sank his head lower, and went forward at a still livelier gait.

He was now upon the square at the further end of which stood Mr. Farrar's house. The bracing walk had set his blood a-tingle; the prospect of Tommy's delight at the gift had put him into a moral glow; in short, despite settling darkness, and bitter weather, Harry was walking in the golden sunshine of imagination. He was also walking upon a very slippery sidewalk. This thought occurred to him only when his feet went sliding in different directions. He tried to recover his balance unavailingly, lurched forward heavily, and then would have fallen, had he not plunged into the arms of another youth.

"I beg your pardon," cried Harry, readjusting himself, and anxiously putting the package to his ear, "if you hadn't saved me—good! it's ticking—I might have—"

Here Harry, having removed the package from his ear, and taken a more accurate look at his preserver, started back dramatically.

In front of him, his face mantled with blushes, stood Tommy Farrar, apparently dreadfully ashamed of himself. He was hugging a large envelope to his bosom in a way that made him look like a disconcerted chicken-thief. Harry's ease of manner, too, it must be confessed, left much to be desired. As he stepped back he swept the package into the pocket of his coat, while rosy signals manifested themselves on a face already aglow from the lively tramp.

There was a moment of silence.

"I—er was a-going to leave something at your house," said Harry at length, getting out each word as though it were a bucket in a well; "but I didn't want you to see me."

"And I was going to post a card—a Christmas card to you," stuttered Tommy; "but I didn't mean you should know. Here it is; it isn't much; but it's the best I could do."

"And here's the package, Tommy, and—and—we're friends, aren't we?"

“Oh, Harry!”

Then the two lads shook hands, and said some words which would be unintelligible on paper.

“And now we’ll be able to do our parts well, won’t we?” said Harry.

“You can just bet,” answered Tom. “For the last week I’ve been worrying about our quarrel. That play set me thinking; it seemed to be preaching at me all the time.”

“Same way with me,” said Harry.

“And then yesterday, when Mr. Murdock told us that the best preparation that we could make for bringing out the play well would be to get the real spirit of love and peace which belongs to Christmas, I made up my mind that I’d have to go and ask your pardon.”

“Same way with me,” put in Harry, “and now I’m ready to go and make a stunning confession.”

“So am I, Harry; let’s go off at once.”

Then arm in arm they went off to confession; and I doubt not that the angels rejoiced.

V. “THE PLAY’S THE THING”

Was it a bit of chance that Mr. Murdock put Mr. Verdin on the corner seat to the right of the main aisle, and Mr. Farrar on the corner to the left, and both in the front row? At all events it was awkward for these gentlemen, who, when their faces were not buried in their programmes, stared straight ahead.

Behind the scenes great good humor prevailed. The actors now knew that Tom and Harry were reconciled, and having something of the angelic in them on this angelic day, they rejoiced exceedingly. Confidence was restored; each felt that the play was sure to succeed. All, then, went merry as a marriage bell, till the angel produced a diversion by declaring that he would *not* be painted.

“You think I’m going out before all those people wearing a gown, and looking like a girl? Don’t you believe it!” he exclaimed indignantly.

“All angels wear gowns,” said Clarence.

“Well, this angel wears a gown too; but he doesn’t paint his cheeks, no more than any other angel.”

When Mr. Murdock came upon the group, the costumer was in a state of despair. At a word from his teacher, however, Dave consented to be painted.

“If you say so, I’ll stand it,” he growled; “though I don’t want to look any

prettier than I am.”

“Aw!” exclaimed Clarence disdainfully, “You needn’t pretend you don’t want to look pretty; it’s looking like a girl that’s bothering you.”

Then Clarence just succeeded in dodging the angel’s shoe.

The play opened well; each little actor, full of the Christmas spirit, was unconsciously communicating it to the audience. Every word, every gesture, was measured; but there was no measure to their play of feeling.

The charm was unbroken till the angel appeared. Here, however, there seemed to be a collapse. The angel was to have glided out majestically, to have raised one graceful arm towards heaven, and in slow, solemn, silvery accents, announced the glad tidings of our Saviour’s birth. He departed considerably from his training. Coming out with a hurried step, he cast a wild glance at the audience, shriveled up, as it were; and, forgetting to raise his hand, in one breath which was also breathless made his little speech, and disappeared before the audience could fairly take in the situation. Mr. Murdock, who was prompter, seemed to have foreseen the turn of events. Before the angel had finished his announcement he sent out a special messenger to twelve trusty youths whom he had stationed within easy reach. His message was simply, “Give the angel an encore.” So when David, in an agony of stage-fright, had rushed off the stage, the applause was prolonged. In the midst of it Mr. Murdock obtained the angelic ear.

“David,” he said, “they want you back. Go out slowly, say your part deliberately, and you’ll bring down the house.”

David flushed with pleasure. While the red lights were still glowing he came back with solemn step upon the stage, lifted his arm, and delivered the glad tidings in so measured a tone that the whole house followed the speech with bated breath. His second appearance was entirely satisfactory, and, as he made a not ungraceful exit, the applause was sustained. Thus the threatened danger was averted; defeat was changed into victory. From that moment the dialogue proceeded as though each speaker were inspired.

The quarrel scene between Verdin as Benoni, and Farrar as Faustinus, was animated. At length the moment of reconciliation came—the moment so much dreaded by the author of the play.

According to prearrangement, the two were to have clasped hands. This they did, and the author’s sigh of relief was drowned in the murmur of satisfaction breathed by the audience.

Of a sudden Harry Verdin introduced a new feature; he threw his arms about Farrar. Tommy responded, and there they stood, actually hugging each other.

Tom almost blubbered; the tears stood in Harry's eyes. It was a reconciliation such as is seldom witnessed upon any stage. No wonder the audience was carried away.

Mr. Farrar, gazing rapt at the tableau, felt the tears rising to his eyes. He took out his handkerchief, and was about to pass it over his face when a touch on his shoulder caused him to turn his head. Mr. Verdin was standing beside him, and *his* eyes looked watery too.

"James," said Mr. Verdin, "our boys up there are teaching us a lesson, and I've learned it; old friend, let's shake hands."

And while every man, woman and child gazed in rapture and with applause upon the stage-scene, these two hard men of business clasped hands with a warmth which gave promise that their enmity was gone forever.

QUICK ACTION

QUICK ACTION

THE sun from on high was looking straight down upon a small sailboat two hours out from Belize, British Honduras, an eighth of a mile from the mangrove-fringed mainland and, on the other side, one league away from a long, slender cay. The boat was not more than thirty-five feet long; sprawled upon its one deck lay some forty people. Seven or eight of these passengers were protected by the shade of the mainsail; the rest were contentedly baking away under the blistering sun.

Only two were erect—the captain, who stood at the tiller, and, beside him, a slim young lad, oval-faced and of old-ivory complexion. The captain, thick of lip, large of foot, kinky-haired, flat of nose, good-natured, blackfaced and ugly was clearly a Carib. The lad beside him might have been the scion of some Spanish grandee. As a matter of fact he was not. There was Indian as well as Spanish blood in him, and he was one of those lucky creatures of mixed strain who come off with the best in each.

“I am of the sentiment,” observed the Carib captain of the good ship *Honey Dew*, “that there is coming upon us a squall. My sick finger on my right foot always feels bad before a change, and now it makes me a great pain.”

“I have no sick finger,” said the lad, his head high in the air. “But I have eyes and I see a little cloud over there in the east, and it’s growing, and it’s coming toward us.”

There was a copper-faced girl of fifteen lying almost at the feet of the captain and the lad. Her eyes were fastened on the latter in artless admiration.

“Why you not take down sail?” she said, speaking to the captain and looking at the boy.

“Pretty soon, pretty soon,” drawled the Carib, his white teeth revealed in a slow, languid smile.

“We’re never in a hurry in these parts, Mary Ann,” observed the lad, gazing at her in some disdain.

“My name is honorable,” she said darkly. “It is Carmelita.”

“Is that,” asked the youth, gazing at her intently, “your name of baptism?”

“Yes.”

“But you are not Spanish.”

“I was baptized three months since at a convent in New Orleans.”

“Oh!” said the boy. “I thought it was funny. You see, Carmel, anybody can tell you’re an Indian. My name is Manuel. I’m pure Spanish.”

“Do not make foolish with us,” said a man sprawling under the mainsail. “Where did you get that straight hair? You’re part Indian, and you know it. My boy, it is not distinguished to be a liar down here.”

“Oh, well,” said Manuel. “I guess I have some Indian in me; but during the two years I was in the States working as a grocer boy I said I was Spanish, and everybody dropped for it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the man, “so you are Manuel Alvarez.”

“How did you know that?”

“I read about you in the paper. Six months ago an uncle of yours in Spanish Honduras died and left you four hundred dollars, to be spent in giving you some education. And you were sent to St. John’s College, Belize. Why aren’t you there now?”

“I was expelled early this morning.”

“Oh!” cried Carmelita, sitting upright and catching her breath.

At the same moment a huge wave slapped against and over the side of the boat, wetting half of the passengers, most of whom were Caribs. For a few seconds there were signs of life and emotion, with many voices raised. Above all sounded the clear call of a rooster imprisoned in a crated box which a Carib woman was hugging to her bosom. She, too, readjusted herself, sitting erect and placing the box on top of her shawled head. The boat was rocking, but that made no difference to her and her new headpiece.

Turning to the captain she addressed him at some length. Once or twice she became so animated that it looked as though box and rooster would be plunged into the waters of Honduras Bay. She spoke in the purest Carib. To her the captain made affable answer in the same remarkable tongue. Removing the box from her head and passing it into the hands of the woman next to her, she spoke again. Her language was more impassioned than before. She grew eloquent. Her large hands went out in sweeping gestures, each and every finger doing its part. Her eyes glowed.

Once more the captain made answer meet, and smiled a revelation of perfect teeth.

The woman returned with a few short sentences, each one sounding like a stab. Even those aboard who knew no Carib understood that she was calling him names, making odious references to his ancestors, and prophesying dire things about the future of himself and his posterity. To all of which the captain made no reply.

“What’s it all about?” asked Manuel.

“It’s about that he-chicken,” answered the grinning Carib, as the offended woman with a grunt of indignation replaced the box upon her head. “She says it’s worth more than my whole damn boat and passengers. She says it is a bloody rooster.”

“A what?” cried the boy.

“A bloody rooster—a play rooster.”

“Play rooster? Do you mean game?”

“Yes, that’s it. She says her he-chicken is game. And she says that if I allow any more waves to come in this boat she will get damages out of me. She paid ten dollars for it.”

“Do you know,” observed Manuel, “I think I’ll take a look at that rooster after a while. If it looks good to me I’ll buy it. Perhaps I could make something out of it.”

The gust of wind meanwhile had passed. The boat was hardly moving. The sails now and then flapped. One woman, a Yucatecan, opened a lunch box and began to eat. Another followed her example, and then another and another. It was high noon; dinner was served. There was calm on the waves and in the boat.

Upon the silence came the voice of Carmelita.

“You were expelled?”

“Yes,” returned Manuel, addressing the feeding multitude. “You see, I had never been to school before, and I did not like books. I got into several fights, too; and if it had not been for the prefect, Professor Stanton, I would have been long before expelled. He was a kind man, and he tried hard to save me. I love him, and I’ll stick anybody in the ribs who does not.”

Manuel paused and let baleful eyes fall upon each and every one of the feeding multitude. If there was any one present who failed to bear in his heart a personal love for Professor Stanton, that particular person was too absorbed in the immediate business of eating to give it voice.

“Last night,” Manuel continued, “I slipped out of the dormitory and went to see a friend of mine, who lent me five shillings; and then I found a crowd to play cards with. I was winning all right, until one of those fellows, a coolie,

began to cheat. We had a fight. I was arrested. They took me back to the college, and the rector gave me a bed for the night. This morning Professor Stanton brought me down to this boat. I am on my way to Stann Creek, where my father and mother are visiting.”

“And I am going to San Pedro, on Ambergris Bay,” said the girl. “I’ve been expelled, too.”

“From where?”

“From the convent school in New Orleans. I wasn’t there long. It was a rich cousin of mine in Belize who sent me there. I would not do what I was told. They wanted me to study. A week ago I losted my anger and tore up all my books and made foolish in many ways. And when I get home my father will beat me much.”

“You two,” said the skipper, “would make a very fine pair.”

Carmelita glared at the Carib. Manuel, who apparently had not heard the remark, holding up his forefinger breast-high, waved it impressively and remarked:

“I wish your dirty old boat would sink.”

“So do I,” added the charming girl.

“Maybe it will,” returned the skipper. “This dead sea means something. That cloud over there is growing. And what for you wish to get drowned?”

“Who said I wanted to get drowned?” said the boy. “I promised Professor Stanton that I’d not get off this boat until we got to Stann Creek, unless something happened. And I must keep my word to him. Why he was awful fond of me. He was all to pieces because I was expelled. He almost cried. He gave me this.” Here Manuel flung back his shirt, exposing to view a scapular medal and an Agnus Dei upon his youthful breast. “And I promised him to be a good Catholic all my life. And I will.”

The diners, having nothing more to eat, were nearly all paying attention to the eloquent youth. His last declaration aroused much interest. Nearly every one aboard followed his example and proudly exposed to public gaze crucifixes, scapulars and medals. One of them, an old man with unshaven face, exhibited proudly a confessional counter which, he explained, he had stolen and held in special veneration. The old sinner, to do him justice, had not darkened a church door since he made away with the counter.

Manuel was pleased; he had won an audience.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he went on, “why work? Why go into the bush day after day? Why gather chicle? Why cut the mahogany? Do you not know that this is the richest country in the world?”

Judging from the expression on their faces, nobody seemed to know.

“Well, it is so. I tell you, it is so. This is the Spanish Main. This is the place where the pirates, the buccaneers, brought all their treasures. They would come here into this bay of Honduras because they knew the way, and the big ships could not come in because it is shallow. And all around us are buried the treasures of Morgan and Kidd and no end of pirates.”

“I been here all my life—forty years,” observed the skipper, “and I ain’t seen no buried treasures.”

“Bah!” cried Manuel. “How can you see a treasure if it is buried? Did you ever dig?”

“No, Manuel; I live on the water. I have fished.”

“That’s just it. You people here don’t believe there are buried treasures, because you haven’t *seen* them. I’m going to dig.”

Just then a low moaning sound, instinct with threat, reached their ears. The skipper gazed towards the east. The cloud, grown big, was advancing fast upon the waters. To the east there was a long swell which was moving rapidly towards the voyagers.

“Here, Manuel,” cried the skipper, “catch hold of this tiller. There’s a big squall coming. Hey there, you fellow,” he continued, speaking to a brother Carib, “come quick, help me take in sail. Then we cast anchor—maybe.”

The captain, picking his way over the prostrate bodies, was about to furl a sail when the Carib woman, still wearing as headpiece the crated rooster, arose and put herself in his path.

“Here,” she said in her own tongue, “you buy this he-hen for ten dollar.”

“Oh, go ‘way. I’m busy.”

But she was not to be turned aside.

“Take it for nine.”

The skipper laid his hand on her roughly but, after all, in the way of kindness. Lives might depend upon his furling those sails. Up the mast he sprang, and, as the woman reeled under the sweep of his arms, over into the waters went the precious box. High above the growing whine of the winds rose her voice. For a few moments the contest between wind and voice went on, while the skipper and his friend used fingers and toes in a wild effort to furl all sail.

There was some excitement meantime among the passengers. Two men had seized the indignant Carib woman, who was minded to jump into the raging waters after her game rooster.

“Look, Carmelita,” cried Manuel, who seemed to take little interest in the storm, “see that small Carib boy?”

Following the direction indicated by Manuel’s gesture, Carmelita gazed upon a sight which, ordinary enough on that coast, would have aroused the most intense excitement almost anywhere else in the world.

Coming around a point danced a tiny dugout not more than four feet long. Standing in it was a lad of ten—a Carib boy—wielding with extraordinary diligence a small stick, which, by some unusual stretch of the imagination, might be called a paddle. The dugout was dancing frantically. How the boy managed to keep his balance was beyond Caucasian accounting. The boy’s paddle was flying from side to side. If he missed a stroke, Manuel observed, the dugout would capsize. Suddenly his hat, a straw affair, blew off. Luckily a wave caught it before it could get far. Out of the boat jumped the little lad after the hat.

“Oh, Carmelita!” exclaimed the chuckling Manuel, “now for some fun. Ten to one he can’t get into the boat again.”

Manuel’s surmise seemed to be based on good grounds. When the Carib tot tried to get into the boat it capsized. For a few seconds the boy was not to be seen. Then up he rose and straddled the tiny dugout. He seemed to be wrestling with it. Over it turned and under went the boy. Up he came again, and again the boat capsized. Then he had to swim off after the paddle. He was such a busy little boy; and not for one moment did his face, at such short intervals as it showed itself, reveal that he realized there was a howling tempest above him and a host of hungry sharks below. He was simply but pleasantly busy; and when he did succeed in getting back with the hat and the oar into his precious dugout he threw a gracious smile at Manuel and Carmelita, the only two passengers on the *Honey Dew* who seemed at all interested in his performance.

But his smile suddenly ceased, his features grew rigid, his eyes shone with excitement and he set to poling vigorously towards the larger vessel.

For there had come a sudden gust of wind which caught the partially furled sail with such violence that the *Honey Dew* careened violently, and every soul aboard slipped into the waters of the raging Caribbean.

II

Of course, there was some degree of excitement. One man, a commercial traveler from the States, bawling loudly for help, threw up his hands and went under, while the more practical Carib women simply caught hold of the submerged side of the *Honey Dew*. Most of the Carib men swam around

easily, with a view to rescuing any foolish person who might not know how to swim. The skipper himself, looking almost unconcerned, perched himself far out on the lowered mast and gazed around intently to see that all his passengers were provided for. Luckily for the frightened Americano, the skipper happened to be near him as he sank. As captain, he felt that he should be the last to leave the ship; as responsible for each and every passenger, he knew that he must save the man from the States. There was for him a way of doing both. Entwining the “fingers” of his feet—there is a reason among the barefooted Caribs for calling them fingers—about some cordage, he gently but quickly let himself down into the water, his hands searching here and there for the disconcerted passenger. The search came to a quick success; and, his feet still planted on the Honey Dew, the agile skipper, with squirming toes, brought the half-drowned man to his side.

“Jes, this way. Spit out that water. No danger at all,” cried the owner of the wondrous toes. “I have been in twenty wrecks, and I was never drowned once.”

The American, puffing and spluttering, was quickly made safe; and, seated beside the great Carib, earnestly proffered the statement that this was an infernal country. Of course, he couched this remark in stronger and more idiomatic phraseology.

Paying no attention to this comment, the skipper detailed various men to swim off to the mainland and secure themselves nice resting places in the mangrove bushes; all of which they cheerfully did.

“The boat,” he observed, “in its present embarrassment, is not in a way to take care of everybody in first-class style.”

“Are we going to sink here?” cried the American.

“Not any more than we are,” returned the skipper. “It’s not so deep. If we can get it upright again, so much the better. If we cannot, some boat will come along in ten, twelve, fifteen hours—”

“Twelve or fifteen hours!” cried the horrified American.

“Oh, yes. Very short time. Maybe sooner.”

And the skipper turned smiling to the Carib woman, so recently widowed of her he-hen, and listened with patience to that remarkable creature, who wanted him to swim out in search of her lost treasure.

But the impatient reader must be wondering what has become of the tiny boy in the tiny dugout. As the Honey Dew keeled over he paddled vigorously to the rescue. His fine intentions were, a few seconds later, almost brought to naught when his boat swung over so violently to one side that it was only by dint of using every one of his twenty fingers and all his practiced and well-

developed art of equilibrium that he did not plunge headforemost into the angry waters. He glanced down, once his foothold was assured, and discovered the cause of this disturbance. It was the strong hand of Manuel holding to the side of the dugout.

“What for you want spill me?” cried the boy, with a trace of annoyance in his tones.

“I don’t want to spill you,” returned Manuel with some heat, “I just want ___,”

Here Manuel paused to cough. He had swallowed some water without due consideration.

While the very small Carib, carefully poised to make allowance for the badly balanced position of his boat, waited to hear what excuse Manuel had to offer, he was again put to it to keep himself in equilibrium; for the boat suddenly careened quickly and decidedly towards the other side.

The tiny navigator muttered some phrases in his own dear mother tongue which did not sound even remotely prayerful, and turned his large eyes toward the new cause of disturbance. Another hand tightly clinging to the gunwale awarded his gaze, a smaller, more delicate hand with a ring on each finger.

“By Jove,” cried Manuel, “if it isn’t Carmelita!”

Carmelita, having got through with the business of clearing out her lungs, said:

“I don’t want to go back to the *Honey Dew*.”

“For that matter,” returned Manuel, “neither do I. I’ve kept my promise to Professor Stanton, and now I’m through. Say, you and I balance this baby boat very nice.”

“If I go home,” Carmelita went on, “I’ll get a beating. I do not like beatings.”

“And,” returned Manuel, “my father will spank me—me who am seventeen. It makes me foolish.”

“What’s a spanking?” said the infant Carib, with disdain. “My father he do it often and my mother oftener. I care not.”

“Child,” said Manuel, “you have no dignity.”

“No,” returned the child. “I have nothing but this boat and my hat. I very poor.”

“Where do you live?”

“On that cay over there.”

“How far is it?”

“Two mile.”

“Say, will you take us over?”

“How much?” asked the boy.

“Eh?”

“What you give me?”

“Oh! What’s the price of your boat? Maybe I may buy it.”

“Ten dollar.”

“You mean five.”

“Santa Maria! No, take it for nine.”

“I’ll give you five and a half.”

Eventually the boat became Manuel’s property for six dollars, the money to be paid when they reached land.

As a compliment to her sex Carmelita was invited to do the paddling. After all, there were many sharks.

Carmelita answered in her own way that she had never taken sharks seriously, that she knew little of paddling, but was an expert swimmer. So it came to pass that while the captain of the *Honey Dew* was disposing all things as sweetly as might be, so as to make the best uses of adversity, the wondrous three, Carmelita and Manuel swimming, and the small boy paddling rapidly, moved out upon the Spanish Main, already as calm and tranquil as though it knew not the thing called squall.

III

An hour or so later, Manuel observed:

“Claudio, I notice there are two cays together, the big one where you live and, right below it, a little bit of an island. Who owns that baby island?”

Claudio stopped paddling. At the same moment Manuel, letting himself down and discovering that he was in shallow water, stood erect, his face and armpits rising above the vasty deep. Carmelita proceeded to do likewise, and presented the interesting spectacle of a young miss struggling to stand and at the same time to keep her mouth and nose above the water.

“Americano—he once own it,” explained Claudio.

“He came here after big war in American States. He buy island. He stay here. He alone. One day he go out for swim—ten, eleven years he go out. And he come back not at all. The shark he love Americano.”

“Who told you all that?” asked Manuel.

“My godfather. He great man. He know everything. My godfather he own the cay.”

“Is it for sale?”

“Oh, yes. My godfather he try to sell it once, two, six times.”

“How much?”

“Once he wanted Don Pedro Muñoz to take it in a trade for boat. And Don Muñoz he say no. And my godfather he say he give Don Muñoz ten dollars.”

“And what is the worth of Don Muñoz’s boat?”

“He sold it last week for fifteen dollars.”

Manuel looked appraisingly at the tiny island. Its area apparently was about four acres, one-half of it abounding in an orchard of young cocoanut trees, popularly called a cocal. Manuel knew something about the cocoanut industry. These trees would not begin to bear for a year or two. At the further end of the cay was a dilapidated hut with three royal palms fronting it. Beyond the hut was an unusual thing—a bit of elevated land resembling in many ways an Indian mound.

“How long ago was it that your godfather wanted to make that trade with Don Muñoz?”

“Two year ago—more than two year.”

“Oh, I see. And that cocal was a baby cocal then. Say Claudio, we’re going to examine that island. Come on, Carmelita, take my hand.”

The little cay was a pretty spot. Thanks to Claudio’s godfather, it was in fine condition. The cocal, Manuel reflected, would by itself yield him enough to live on. Besides, there was more than an acre left for further cultivation. Above all, that mound! If pirates in the days of gentlemen adventurers ever did hide their treasures in the cays, would they not select just such a place? It stood to reason that they would. As everybody knew, it was impossible to dig two feet below the surface on the flat lands without reaching salt water. But such an elevation as the one before him would hold treasures safely.

Manuel took a glance at the upper cay; it was not more than a mile distant.

“How many people live on that cay of yours, Claudio?”

“One hundred—maybe more. My godfather, he own it.”

“Your godfather must be a great man.”

“He is—very great.”

“Carmelita, what do you think of this place?”

“Very nice. It is better than going to the convent school.”

Manuel regarded her severely.

“Look here,” he said, “you’re not going to live here. Do you know, I’m thinking of buying this place.”

At this announcement, made calmly and casually, Claudio gazed with awe upon the daring youth.

“You much rich!” he exclaimed, removing his hat.

“No, I’m not rich at all. But I’ve got twenty-four dollars in my pocket, and Professor Stanton has one hundred dollars of mine, which he is keeping till I need it.”

Here Carmelita showed that it was possible for her to look at him with deeper respect and reverence. She gave a gasp of admiration.

“This island will be worth twenty-four dollars to me. I’m willing to pay that.”

“You want boy work for you?” cried Claudio, still holding his hat in his hand.

“What can you do?”

“I run message. I fix your lines. I cook. I do what you say.”

“How much do you want?”

“Gi’me five cent a day.”

“Claudio, you’re hired.”

Claudio showed teeth white as the driven foam, and rolled his eyes in a great joy.

“And Carmelita,” Manuel continued, “you’re fired.”

“Fired? Fired? What is that, Manuel?”

“I mean,” explained Manuel, coldly and severely, “that it is time for you to go. Over there!” He pointed dramatically to the cay above.

“It is proper,” the girl observed, lowering her eyes.

Carmelita was a typical Mexican of Indian blood—quick, lithe, graceful, dark, and with a face which, when she was in good humor, was pleasing to the eye. She was very poor indeed, and ignorant. About the only thing of value which she possessed, aside from her youthful comeliness, was the Catholic faith.

“Boy,” continued Manuel, “you will bring this young person to your cay. And see who’ll take care of her.”

“My godfather,” said Claudio, “he do that.”

“Your godfather,” remarked Manuel, “is a wonder, I didn’t think of him.

And then, Claudio, you will tell your godfather that I want to buy this island.”

“I do that. How much you give?”

“Not a cent more than twenty-four dollars.”

Claudio darted down at top speed for the dugout, and sprang into it with such abandon that the tiny boat turned over and over, accompanied in each turn by the clinging Carib.

“You should have more respect for ladies,” said Manuel. “Let the lady get into that boat and you stay outside.”

“Ver’ good. It is not deep most the way.”

Carmelita, plunged in thought, suffered herself to be placed in the boat and, at Manuel’s suggestion, seated herself; whereupon, chattering and singing, Claudio pushed his cargo briskly toward the larger cay.

IV

One hour later Manuel, eating mangoes plucked from one of his prospective trees, saw with no little interest a small sailboat bearing down upon his prospective island. He looked more intently and picked out its three passengers—Carmelita (“What! that girl again?” he muttered), Claudio, and a wiry bronzed man beyond middle age, immaculately clothed in what looked like a suit of pajamas. He was barefooted, too. His attire was faultless and useful. Thus dressed, he could with perfect propriety enter a church or the briny deep.

“That chap,” soliloquized Manuel, “must be the godfather.”

The boat came to anchor within twenty yards of the shore; whereupon, without any ado, the wiry old gentleman stepped into the water, as an American in these United States would step from an automobile to the pavement, followed by the Carib youth and Carmelita. All three were smiling upon Manuel. The godfather, having no hat, removed an imaginary one from his grizzled head, bowed like a Spanish cavalier, with the water up to his waist, while, as he went through this performance, Carmelita, continuing to wade, gained the lead. She was in a hurry. It is a striking thing in the lands about the Spanish Main to see any one in a hurry. It is undignified, it is unusual; and, unless for most serious reasons, it is never done.

Manuel became interested. What wondrous or dire thing could it be that stirred the young lady into such activity?

While he still stood wondering, Carmelita, gaining the land, came running up to him. She was breathing heavily.

"Oh, Manuel," she gasped, "I've saved you six dollars. I got the godfather to let you have it all for eighteen dollars. Don't let him know you've got twenty-four; say nothing."

"Carmelita, you are wise, you are prudent." Saying this, Manuel smiled graciously, and Carmelita blushed prettily and looked happy.

"Good day, Señor Manuel," said the old gentleman, as he came within hailing distance. "Permit me to make myself introduced to you. I am Don Enrico Stefano, at your service."

"Glad to meet you, Don Enrico. How about this island?"

"It is yours at your own price. Of course, there are some papers to be arranged; but I will myself attend to that. It will be brought to a termination in two, three, five days. The price, eighteen dollars, you will pay when the papers are arranged; but as a sign of your good faith five dollars of that sum in advance."

"Here's your money," broke in Manuel.

"Thank you; how quick you are! The island is now yours."

"And its name," declared Manuel, "is Stanton Cay."

On the old gentleman's declaration that the island was Manuel's, Carmelita, flown with joy, clapped her hands.

"And this young lady," continued Don Enrico. "Is she your intended?"

Manuel, looking with upturned nose at the joyous girl, replied:

"I should say not!" Then he added, "I don't mind saying right now that I'm not a marrying man."

"You would make a fine pair," observed the old gentleman, kindly.

All Carmelita's signs of joy meantime had disappeared; her eyes were blazing, her bosom heaving, her hands clenched.

"Boy!" she hissed. "Little boy! Marry! You need a mother's care and a spanking every day before breakfast. And I—I am not a marrying woman."

Having jerked out these words, the fair maiden turned her back upon all and made her way at a brisk run into the cocal, where she was soon lost to view. But Manuel was too interested in his new property to pay any attention to her.

"Look, Don Enrico, I've been over this place and it looks good to me. Now I want a few things, and I want them in a hurry."

"Santa Maria Sacratissima!" exclaimed Don Enrico, throwing out his arms in a gesture that comprehended the two poles. "But how quick you are! And you do it all without the stopping to think."

"I've been two years in the United States," Manuel observed, as though that were sufficient explanation.

"And you want sugar, bread, tea, coffee—"

"Hold on," broke in the new proprietor. "I wasn't thinking of those things at all. What I want right off is a spade or a shovel and a pick."

Don Enrico clasped his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and invoked every saint whose name at the moment he could recall.

"Such industry!" he went on. "You are most remarkable boy. Such energy, such—"

Here Don Enrico paused. During his impromptu litany Claudio, the tiny Carib, had darted into the bushes behind the abandoned hut, and after the briefest of disappearances had reappeared carrying in one hand a shovel, in the other a pick.

"Been here a long time," he exclaimed, with a grin that lit up his face. "I hide them myself. Sometime I come here and dig bait."

"Claudio," said Manuel, smiling benignly, "you have more than earned your first day's salary. You're a very good boy."

Claudio beamed.

"Now, Don Enrico," continued Manuel, addressing the dazed old man, "you said something about buying me some provisions."

"Yes, Don Manuel, I did—oh, how quick you are! How much?"

"Here are five dollars," said the youth, becoming each moment more and more of a Spanish grandee. "Buy me pepper and salt and sugar and things like that—"

"With so much pleasure," interrupted Don Enrico. "I bring 'em, maybe tomorrow, maybe in a day or two."

"And am I to starve while I wait?" cried the landed proprietor. "No, no, I want them promptly. I want them by return trip."

"Santa Maria!" ejaculated the elder, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes; and two chickens and fish and cassava. Say, Don, and I want you to take supper with me."

Don Enrico, catching his breath, held up his hand before his breast, the forefinger extended. This latter he waved impressively from side to side for several seconds.

"Go on and talk," prompted Manuel, his eyes involuntarily wandering toward the Carib lad, who, having heard the bill of fare, was rolling upon the earth in sheer delight.

The elder, hastily informing the nine choirs of angels that the young man in his presence was the quickest young man he had ever met, said to Manuel:

“Don Manuel, just before I heard you wanted to buy this island—”

“Stanton Cay,” put in Manuel sternly.

“Thank you—Stanton Cay—I was out catching crabs. I got five splendid ones, and may I present you two for your feast?”

“Thank you very much. And get the other things, and—oh, yes, Claudio, you go along with him, and help him; and if you’re not back in two hours I’ll throw you to the sharks.”

And then Manuel, somehow or other, bundled the two into the vessel and saw them weigh anchor before Don Enrico had any chance to call upon heaven to witness these remarkable doings.

The vessel had not gone far, when Manuel, standing on the shore, suddenly clapped his hands together.

“Ai! Ai!” he exclaimed. “Carmelita! I forgot all about her. Hey!” he yelled, “Hey, you Don Enrico! Hey, hey!” As he spoke he gesticulated violently and stamped fiercely upon the ground. “Come back! Come back!”

Don Enrico heard his voice with alarm and viewed his gestures with dismay. Did the boy want him to sail faster? Never in all his days had he met so fiery, so impetuous, a youth. It was blowing hard; more sail would be dangerous. Nevertheless the old man, invoking all heaven as he did so, put on all sail and then prayed in right good earnest.

As the vessel flew through the water Manuel danced and shouted and, I regret to say, swore.

“Oh, well,” he said when it was borne in upon him that he was wasting his energy, and picking up pick and shovel, he ran, literally ran, toward the mound.

When, one hour and fifty-five minutes later, Don Enrico’s vessel came to anchor in the same place, Manuel and Carmelita hand in hand dashed into the water and hastened toward him.

“Look!” cried Manuel when within easy speaking distance. “When does Father Horn from St. John’s college come to visit your cay?”

“He’s here now,” answered Don Enrico. “He goes to-morrow noon. He comes every month.”

“Hurrah!” cried Manuel. “Up with your anchor, Don. We’re going back with you. Carmelita and I are going to be married!”

V

There is a strong expression sometimes employed in the United States to indicate that a man loses his composure to an extraordinary degree and is, as it were, beside himself. They say that "he is throwing fits." Well, I know of no way to give an idea of Don Enrico's conduct on receiving this astounding news than to say that he began to throw fits. While he is engaged in this process and being brought back to realities by the united efforts of Claudio, Manuel, and Carmelita, the reader, too gentle to contemplate unmoved the good old man's dire straits, is asked to turn back to that point of our story where we left Manuel, pick and shovel in hand, on his way to the mound.

He walked up its slight declivity as one who knew just where he was going and what he intended to do. There was at one end of the mound a species of palm tree, and right beneath it a space nearly four feet square, marked out to the observant eye by twelve small stakes. Nine hundred and ninety-nine Americans out of a thousand would not have perceived these stakes. But Manuel, whose early training had been conducted in the open, whose eyes had been in no wise impaired by his two years' employment in the United States, and who moreover had spent half an hour, before buying the property, in going over every foot of the mound's surface, espied one stake without the least difficulty. Bending down to his task and pushing aside the weeds, he had quickly made out the other marks. No wonder he had been anxious for pick and shovel. In his mind there could be no doubt. That famous pirate, Peter the Great, might have visited there, or Wallace, or Portuguese, or Kidd, or Roc. At any rate, some pirate had left his treasure for Manuel to inherit.

"Ah!" exclaimed Manuel, laying down shovel and pick, "It can't be hidden very deep. I'll have the treasure in half an hour."

Throwing off his collar and tie—for Manuel was dressed like a student of St. John's—rolling up his sleeves, and spitting upon his hands, he seized the pick and raised it high in air. The regular thing for that pick to do was to come down forcefully upon the grass-grown spot. But the pick remained in air, Manuel's jaw dropped, wonder come into his eyes, disgust wrinkled his nose.

"What, *you* again!" he growled, without changing position.

"Yes, I'm here," answered the dark Indian maid.

"You squaw!" roared Manuel, throwing down his pick.

The young lady thus gallantly addressed was standing with one arm about the palm tree. She looked at the moment, like the naiad of that particular palm. Her hair newly braided, around her brow a garland of red flowers flanked by green leaves, it required little stretch of the imagination to conceive her as the

soul of that sentinel palm, given a body in order to warn away any sacrilegious hand that durst touch those hidden treasures.

But if anyone, howsoever imaginative had heard her next remark, he would have been disillusioned out of hand.

“You ugly beast!” she returned, her face blackening in wrath.

“You go on away,” returned Manuel. “Get off my island.”

“How can I get off?” she countered.

“Can’t you swim?”

“I have better manners,” she returned, “than to go swimming into a strange place. I’m going to help you dig.”

Without waiting to see the effect of this announcement upon Manuel, Carmelita picked up the shovel.

“You have your nerve!” gasped the almost petrified youth. “People who know me and Professor Stanton say that I have much nerve. Professor Stanton, he says I got more nerve than anybody he ever saw even in the States. But Professor Stanton never saw you.” Grunting to express his mingled feelings of astonishment and disgust, Manuel struck his pick into the earth.

In a few minutes the two were hard at it. A quarter of an hour passed in serious work and unbroken silence. They had made an excavation more than two feet. Then——

“Ai! Ai!” screamed Carmelita as her shovel came upon some metallic obstruction. Throwing the tool aside, she bent down and began clawing savagely. Manuel dropped his pick and followed suit.

“It’s a weapon!” he gasped as finally, using all his strength, he pulled forth a rusty scabbard in which had reposed for a century or more, so he supposed—a splendid sword.

“Hurrah!” he cried, drawing it and waving it aloft. “A pirate captain owned this once.”

While Manuel waved the sword wildly, felt its edge, and bent it now this way now that, Carmelita, forgetting pick and shovel, dug furiously with her hands, for all the world like a dog after a mole.

“Ai! Ai! O Manuel, look!” Carmelita’s face was aglow with excitement and wild dreams.

Manuel obeyed her injunction. Her nimble fingers had laid bare the top of a cedar chest!

“The treasure! The treasure!” yelled Manuel, jumping down and scratching and tearing with bare fingers.

Had an American seen these two, just then, he would have revised his ideas of the customs and manners of the tropics. They were working furiously.

“Hold,” commanded Manuel at length, waving an impressive forefinger.

Then, while the young lady sank back upon her knees in the attitude of a Turk, Manuel with much and mighty tugging brought up out of the hole a cedar chest two feet long, about one foot wide and one foot deep.

“Now,” said Manuel, “the next question is, how are we going to get it open?”

Manuel raised his hands to his brows.

Carmelita leaned over, caught the lid and raised it.

“This way,” she said simply.

Manuel had no comment for this remark. His eyes were glued upon the contents of the box.

Before him, in ordered rows, six in all, lay paper money bills—crisp, clear-cut, fresh!

Manuel caught up one packet and ran his eyes over the bills.

“These are each five dollars,” he said. “Here, count them.”

“These,” remarked Manuel, as Carmelita ran with nimble fingers through the bills in the first package, “are ten-dollar bills. And here is another package of tens, and three more of twenties.”

“There are two hundred bills here,” said Carmelita presently.

“That will be one thousand dollars,” commented Manuel, using all his fingers in making the count. “Ah! there are two hundred in this package of tens—that will be two thousand.”

“Look, Manuel,” cried the girl, “these packages are all the same size. There must be two hundred in each. Oh, but you are a rich man!”

“Wait,” commanded the boy. “Let me count.”

Using his pick as a pencil and a bit of sandy soil as paper, the boy, after severe mental labor lasting nearly half an hour, finally announced:

“Carmelita, here’s the answer: Two hundred fives are one thousand dollars; four hundred tens are four thousand dollars, and six hundred twenties are twelve thousand dollars. In all I have seventeen thousand dollars!”

“Maybe you are the richest man in the world!” exclaimed the girl, eyeing the youth in artless admiration, strongly dashed with reverence.

“No, Carmelita, I am not. John D. Rockefeller, the American, is richer, I believe. But his money, they say, is tainted. I would not have tainted money.”

"Yours," said the young lady, "is nice and clean."

"Carmelita—" began the youth.

"Oh!" interrupted the girl, who had just removed the last package of twenties, "Look what's here!"

Lying side by side under these bills were twelve shining pieces of gold, all of one size.

Manuel took up one and scanned it.

"It's a ten-dollar gold piece," he said, "and twelve of them make—how much is ten times twelve?"

"One hundred," answered Carmelita.

"One hundred and twenty, you goose. You are poor at counting, Carmelita," he said, sweeping as he spoke the gold pieces into his pocket.

"Does that make you as rich as Rocker—Rocker——"

"Not quite, I think. Rockefeller is very rich; but I am the richest man in the colony."

"It was very smart of you to buy this island," commented the admiring girl.

"You see, Carmelita, that cocal in two years will yield me a good deal, and if I plant the other two acres and go fishing two or three times a week, I won't have to touch my fortune at all."

While Manuel was speaking a sudden change came over the girl's face. The artless admiration disappeared.

"Why don't you say *our* fortune, Manuel?"

"What's that?" cried the boy sharply.

"I said *our* fortune; we both earned it."

"The nerve!" exclaimed the boy.

"And I saw it first," continued the girl.

"It's my ground; it's my hill. And it was I who found the place. Confound it! you *would* butt in. Who wanted you around anyhow? I did not ask you to dig. I did not want you to help. You can go now if you want to."

"I *will* go," said the girl stoutly. "And I will walk or wade or swim over to that cay, and I will *buy this island myself*. I will pay more than you offered."

Manuel, though he gave no outward sign was disturbed. He felt that he should give the girl something. In fact, it had been his intention, while he was counting his treasure, to reward her handsomely. But the spirit of contradiction, the imp of perversity, had been aroused in him. Moreover, what if she should make good her threat, outbid him, and buy the island, which he

already considered his own, over his head? For a moment he stood undecided. But the spirit of bravado was still stout in him. After all the girl had no money on hand. She was possibly making idle threats.

“Go on and wade,” he said, folding his arms. “You may buy the island, but that won’t make the treasure yours. I found the treasure before you thought of buying the island.”

He paused and considered.

“Oh, yes! Go on and wade,” he added. “If you buy the island, the treasure will be gone and hidden again, and no man shall have power to find it but myself. And—Oh, I never thought of that—if you offer thirty dollars I will offer fifty. Go on and wade, and I hope every shark in these waters will take a bite at you.”

Carmelita, standing erect, looked him full in the face. She read no signs of weakening—imperious disdain was stamped upon his features.

“All right, I go. And I hope the sharks will bite me to death. I care not. I am hurt.”

Lowering her head, clasping her hands and turning slowly, Carmelita walked with measured steps toward the water.

She did not see the change that had come over Manuel. He, too, lowered his head, and blushed. He felt that he had done a mean and stingy thing. No one had ever called him mean and stingy. What was he to do?

While he was thus meditating, Carmelita threw herself upon the ground and burst into a fit of weeping.

“Oh, pardon, pardon, Carmelita,” cried the boy, running to her side. “I was only in fun. I did not intend for to give you nothing. I am a Spanish gentleman. Stop to weep.”

Carmelita dug her fists into her eyes, endeavoring vainly to staunch the copious flow of tears, and continued to make moan.

“Look you, Carmelita, I will reward you richly. Only stop to weep.”

The girl made an effort; the tears still streamed, but she grew quiet.

“I tell you, I give you two gold pieces, and twenty five dollar bills. What think you of that, Carmelita? Is it enough?”

“You are very good, Manuel,” she said rising. “You are kind. Perhaps you need the money.”

“What if I do? But I don’t. Say, Carmelita, I think I give you twenty-five five-dollar bills.”

“You are too good—much, oh, much too good. I ought to have nothing, I

had not ought to be here. The treasure is all yours.”

“I will give you three pieces of gold besides.”

“No, no, I will take nothing. Oh, Manuel, you are kind, you are brave.”

“But you must take something. It is right.”

“No, no. I thanks. I take nothing.”

“Carmelita, I insist. I think I give you half.”

Then Carmelita blushed exquisitely, and, becoming perceptibly confused, put her finger to her mouth.

“Manuel, I have a good thought.”

“What is it?”

“Are you sure you must give me something?”

“I insist now on giving you half.”

“But, Manuel, we—we—I—you—why, Manuel, there would not be need to give me anything—if-if—”

“If what, Carmie?”

“If—if—we were—married!” On uttering this last word Carmelita covered her face with her hands.

“By all the pirates!” cried Manuel. “Do you know, I never thought of that?”

Manuel strode up and down. The girl kept her hands before her eyes.

“That plan,” meditated the youth aloud, “would keep the treasure together.”

He still strode up and down; Carmelita still kept her face covered. However, though Manuel knew it not, she extemporized windows between the fingers of each hand. If anything escaped the bashful child’s observation it was very negligible.

“My father married at seventeen,” Manuel went on.

“And my mother married at fourteen,” volunteered the girl, removing her hands just long enough to make the remark.

“And this morning,” continued the richest man in the colony, “when I told Professor Stanton that I wanted to be a Jesuit—”

“What!” cried the girl, removing her hands.

“Yes; I thought I could get back to St. John’s college that way. Besides, I wanted to be with him. When I told him that he laughed. I do not mind when Professor Stanton laughs at me. It is different with others. And he said that God did not want me to be a Jesuit.”

“Professor Stanton is a very wise man,” interpolated Carmelita; and once more she covered her face.

“And do you know what he said, Carmelita? Why, he told me to save up and buy some property and to keep on praying for a good wife.”

“Ah! Ah!” cried Carmelita.

“And I do not have to save up. I am rich. And I have bought property. And—and—Carmelita, if I marry you, I will have not to spend so much time to pray.”

“It is so,” said the girl.

“Yes, Carmelita, I have thought it over, and I will take Professor Stanton’s advice and I will marry you.”

“All right,” said the girl. “When?”

“When?” repeated the boy. “Carmelita, I tell you one other thing. Professor Stanton he always tells me that I must do things quick. He told me that the Americanos do things while we people of Central America are thinking about them. He says, ‘Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.’ When Don Enrico comes back with that boat we’ll get aboard and go right over and get married right away.”

“I think,” said the blissful maiden, “that we can afford to give Professor Stanton *all* of our treasure.”

“Carmelita,” returned Manuel, beaming, “I begin to like you.”

“But it is just that we have good Catholic marriage,” the girl continued. “A priest, the ringing of many bells at least three times, two flower girls and the Holy Mass.”

“Carmie, you are right,” admitted the groom-elect with a sigh. “And it is clear to me that we cannot have Mass to-day. It shall be to-morrow.”

“But perhaps there is no priest at the cay.”

“Maybe not, Carmie, but the luck is running our way. And if there is no priest I will charter a boat, and we will set out to-night and get married to-morrow.”

“And I want a veil to fall down to my heels.”

“You shall have a veil.”

“And what are you going to give Professor Stanton? We need no money. I will take care of the coccol and sow the rest of the ground with good things to eat and to sell. And you will fish and sell what we do not eat. We are provided for. We need nothing. What will you give him?”

“I will give him all the bills except one bill from each of the six bunches.

That will be eighty-five dollars for us. And we will keep also the twelve pieces of gold.”

“It is good,” cried the girl, clapping her hands. “And now, Manuel, if you will rest I will go and gather mangoes and some other things so that you may eat.”

“How thankful you are! I forgot. We’ll have to call that supper off, and we’ll both be hungry. While you’re gone, Carmie, I will pack this box with the money and have it ready, and we’ll bring it to Professor Stanton on our wedding journey.”

“Oh, Manuel!” cried Carmelita, coloring, and looking really beautiful. The light of love was in her eyes as she skipped away in search of provisions.

By the time Manuel had packed the box and hidden it away in a corner of the ancient shack destined to be his future home, Carmelita returned with mangoes and other tropical food.

Then the two sat down and discussed their future placidly. They would receive Holy Communion at the nuptial Mass even if they had to fast till noon. And they would make a general confession of their whole lives.

“After marriage,” commented Manuel, “I will no longer make foolish. Professor Stanton said that the best time for a man to reform his life is when he gets married.”

“Don’t you think we could spare him two or three of those gold coins also?” suggested the girl.

“Maybe, I like it to be so. If we have any gold left after our marriage and our wedding trip we give it to him. He is my best friend.”

“I like him better than you,” said Carmelita.

For five minutes following this remark it looked as though the engagement would be broken off. The dispute came to an end in sullen silence on both sides. Gazing out upon the water, Manuel absently began to hum the words of a litany. It was the litany of the Blessed Virgin that the St. John’s college boys sang once every week.

Carmelita brightened. She knew that air, too. And the girl had a sweet alto. Quietly she began to sing. Manuel’s voice, a promising tenor, grew louder. Very soon the two were caroling as sweet a duet as ever fell upon the ears of Caribbean sharks. From the litany they went on to other hymns; and on they sang till peace had returned to their hearts and tranquility to their faces.

“Carmie,” said Manuel, “I have, too, a good thought. After this, whenever we get furious at each other, we sing the litany.”

“It is a good thought. I am sorry.”

“And so am I. And look! Here comes the boat.”

“Say, Manuel,” said the girl, as they started for the shore, “I tell you something. I confess. It was make-believe when I asked you to divide the treasure with me. I did not want anything.”

“What! And why did you make such a trick with me?”

“Because, Manuel, I thought it would put it into your head to marry me.”

“And was it make-believe when you cried?”

“Manuel,” answered the blushing girl, who, by the way, has never answered that question, “just as soon as I saw you I—I—loved you much.”

“Come on, let’s hurry down,” said Manuel, who began to find the conversation somewhat dull.

VI

The voyage to the cay nearly drove the old man out of his senses. Before they were fairly started he found that he had sold his sailing boat to Manuel for twenty dollars, ten dollars in cash and the other half to be paid after the wedding journey. Five minutes afterward he was wondering how he had allowed himself to part with his valued chest of tools for ten dollars down. Before he could realize that the tools were no longer his he was agreeing to surrender his fishing net for the same price and on the same basis of payment. During all these transactions the old man gave the saints of heaven no rest. He called upon them all in general and by name to a really remarkable number. His soul was stirred to its depths.

It was Manuel who inaugurated all these deals, but it was the glad-eyed and eager Carmelita who put them through. The girl had a genius for bargaining. Several times Don Enrico gave over praying in order to wrestle with himself against a temptation to stab her and throw her out of the boat. Even when the bargaining stopped Don’s troubles did not come to an end. Boy and girl loaded him with commissions to be attended to out of hand. Among these was the immediate purchase of a veil—a bridal veil—which was to trail one yard at least behind the bride.

“And,” added Manuel, “Claudio will carry the train.”

On learning this, Claudio, using principally his toes, climbed up into the rigging and performed feats of agility which should by rights have ended in his being cut off prematurely in his youthful innocence.

It was also borne in upon Don Enrico that the happy pair were “wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice.” They had, this most astonishing boy and girl,

discovered a treasure. Money to them was no consideration. Their intended marriage was to be brought to a successful issue on the morrow even if every vessel on the cay had to be chartered, and every man, woman and child living thereon had to be pressed into service.

The incessantly grinning Carib youth was, in that short trip of twenty-five minutes, created commander of the newly bought boat, with strict injunctions to have it rechristened *The Indian Maid*. The name was to be painted on the bow by the morrow, everything that Manuel had bought was to be packed aboard, and after the wedding ceremony the youthful commander was to have it ready to set sail on their wedding journey at a moment's notice.

The boat was scarcely anchored when the happy pair in unconventional fashion made for the shore. Wading in water four feet deep gave them no thought. Before they were well on shore a group of men and women had gathered to see them. The natives were mostly of Spanish-Indian blood. Among them, clad in khaki, tall, slender, and with a genuinely white face, stood the missionary priest, Father Horn.

"Hey, Father," cried Manuel so soon as he had touched land, "do you not remember me? I was going to your college till this morning. I was expelled this morning and wrecked at noon, and bought my property this afternoon—and now I want to get married."

Presently Father Horn was engaged in a strictly private conversation with the youthful pair. He went into the matter of their parentage, their ages, their family history, the circumstances which led to their espousals—to all of which three-fourths of the natives eagerly gave ear.

Father Horn pointed out several difficulties. They were too young. Not at all, was the answer. Here it was that each and every member of the self-constituted advisory council came in with his testimony, and Father Horn learned with some amazement of any number of couples here and there throughout the colony who had married early.

There were certain legal difficulties. To their rescue came Don Enrico, on whose swarthy features great amazement still lingered. He could smooth these out.

Finally, Father Horn declared that in view of their tender ages he could not, he would not, marry them without the consent of their parents.

Manuel's jaw dropped. He was checkmated. Then to him came the fair Carmelita and whispered in his ear.

"Of course. We'll get their permission," he said before Carmelita had quite finished. "Don Enrico, are there two men here with good sailboats?"

"What! Do you want to buy more boats? Santa Maria, what next!"

“No, but they’ve got to start right off, one to see my father and one to see Carmelita’s. And they’ve got to be back to-morrow morning and we’ll be married just as soon as the boats come back.”

Every man possessing a vessel of any sort sprang forward. None of them wanted pay. The noble Don picked out the best two sailors, who in turn chose their own mates, and having instructed them, with Manuel’s assistance, as to the whereabouts of the respective parents and carefully prepared them in the manner of speech they were to make, he bade them Godspeed, and as they put on sail promised them a special dinner out of his own pocket if they came back by the morrow’s dawn.

With the exception of children of the tenderest age, no one slept that night. Father Horn devoted one hour to instructing the two on religion in general and another on marriage in particular, a shorter period to hearing their sins, and the rest of the night in adorning the chapel. The tiny commander of *The Indian Maid* tried out his boat. Tying two ropes attached to the rudder to his magnificently developed big toes, he thus steered the boat, while with his hands he managed the sail. He had often seen it done, and was filled with joy and pride when he succeeded in doing it himself. Claudio was born to be a great skipper. Almost every woman in town was busy helping to make tortillas and other tropical dishes. The men went out, some of them after crabs, others into Don Enrico’s cocal to secure a plentiful supply of cocoanuts. The best hands at the needle gave their hours and their skill to making Carmelita’s veil and wedding dress. All the night long the promised couple conversed, sang hymns, said their beads—given them after confession by Father Horn—and in the intervals between came down upon the dress-makers and the cooks and urged them to top speed.

At early dawn there stood upon the shore a young man clothed like a Spanish grandee and a young lady all in white, wearing a veil, the end of it being held up sturdily by the youthful Carib, Claudio, clad for the occasion in an immaculate nightgown which reached to his ebony heels. Behind Carmelita he stood motionless for one hour, a splendid study in black and white. Standing back of this picturesque group was the entire population of the cay, from the gray-headed nonagenarian to the mother bearing in her arms the baby of one week.

It was a striking tableau.

An hour passed; the sun rose; a quarter passed and then—

“A sail! A sail!” cried Don Enrico.

Screams and yells broke the long silence. The party was just quieting down when the train-bearer, losing his statuesque pose, piped out:

“Another sail!” and, forgetting his dignity in his joy, he essayed to turn a Caribbean handspring.

Pandemonium ensued, during which the chimes in the hands of an expert bell ringer broke into melodious sound, and all fell into line for the marriage procession.

VII

No one doubted that the parents of the youthful couple would give their consent; and the event showed that their judgment was good. Manuel’s father sent word that the boy really needed a keeper, but a wife might do just as well. Carmelita’s mother sent the girl her heartiest congratulations; to the young man her sincerest condolences. Both messages were received by all concerned with perfect joy and unbroken gravity.

The procession was a thing of beauty. The happy pair led, followed immediately by the youthful Carib, Claudio, and two flower girls arrayed in shifts as white as their teeth, and bearing, both of them, a chain of flowers. Claudio was the observed of all. With his head thrown back, his eyes, revealing only their whites, turned to the skies, and his chest out, he moved along with a strut which without much exaggeration might be styled the military goose-step. The child was simply bursting with pride. Several of the men in the procession blessed with a sense of humor sent up secretly fervent ejaculations to heaven that the train bearer might get tangled up in his spotless gown and fall. But there was no such luck.

Once more the chimes pealed forth. If you want to know what possibilities there are in the way of bell ringing, you must go to British Honduras. No service may start in that blessed country without three separate announcements in the way of chiming; and each time the chiming is different. It is mingled sweetness long drawn out, and every variation has a meaning of its own.

Before the bell ringer’s second performance was quite finished the two flower girls, pretty little Spanish brunettes of tender years, contrived to catch the stride and strut and ways of the young train bearer; and they achieved this success with perfect gravity.

Within forty yards of the church the procession was halted for the purpose of giving the bell ringer an opportunity of rendering the third performance on the bells; and the soul of that sweet, silver tintinnabulation ringing out on the fresh morning air seemed to enter into the blood of the vast marriage party.

When Father Horn, coming during this last musical performance to the church door to meet the couple, raised his eyes, he started, stared, and then

buried his face and his smiles in the ritual.

They were all, save the happily unconscious bride and groom, doing the goose-step. The youthful Carib had won the day.

At the door Father Horn married them; and upon a nobler groom and a sweeter looking bride the sun of the Spanish Main never shown. The marriage ceremony completed, Father Horn, taking each by the hand, led them to the altar. There they knelt while the flower girls yoked them together with the chain of flowers.

Many of the men present were, it must be confessed, poor churchgoers. But a morning wedding was a novelty. So they came to grin, and remained to be edified. Manuel and Carmelita had been wild and wayward; but their faith was alive. And that faith they showed in every action, particularly in their reception of Holy Communion.

From the church the assembly moved processionally to the largest house on the cay, Don Enrico's. This good but sorely amazed man had placed it at the disposal of the wedding party. Thither they marched like Prussians on parade. The house was of the prevalent fashion; in fact, one might say, of the only fashion, differing from the others simply in its size and height. Large uprights and a double row of stakes bound together by withes formed the frame work; the rest was caked mud, with a roof made of the branches of cohune palm. These roofs are water-tight and much affected by scorpions. Back of Don Enrico's spacious house was a smiling garden; and here it was that the guests were served to a wedding breakfast, the memory of which is still spoken of on that cay with lively memories.

Manuel was hungry. He ate with more than his usual appetite. His fair spouse nestling at his side was content to feast her eyes upon his youthful beauty. She was blushing meekness in human form. It would be hard to imagine that any human being could possibly be as gentle as she looked. The happy pair possessed between them appetite and love enough for two, but the division was distressfully unequal. Manuel had all the appetite, Carmelita all the love. Apparently the young groom had forgotten all about her existence. After all, he was a boy and nothing more. He had been too active that day to have time for sentiment.

The first course was still being served when the best man of the wedding came up and whispered in Manuel's ear.

"Señor Manuel," he said, "there are in our company on this day a flock of young men who are come in from gathering chicle. They sing most beautiful, one of them plays the guitar, and their songs are slow and tender. Maybe, it is said, if they were given some rum, which they very much like, it would

encourage them to sing. And they dance the Spanish dances like fairies.”

“Well, go on and give them rum,” said Manuel.

“Ai, Ai! But we poor; we have it not. You are much rich. You can get it for twenty-five cents the bottle.”

“Of course, I’ll pay. Where do you buy it?”

Manuel as he spoke took from his pocket his six crisp bills which he had reserved toward paying the expenses of his wedding journey.

“Oh, Manuel,” pleaded Carmelita, “do not so. We can spend the money better.”

“Now, look here,” cried the grand youth sternly, “I’d like to know right now who’s the head of this family?”

“Oh, pardon, pardon, Manuel! You are the head. I—I forgot myself. Do what you think good.”

Manuel, gazing at her for a few moments with strong disfavor, turned to the best man. “Who sells the stuff?”

“Oh, Don Enrico, of course. He is at the store now, sending supplies over here.”

“Good. Here, take this five-dollar bill and go over and buy up all the rum he’ll give you.” And Manuel turned his entire attention to a dish of tortillas.

It was just then that Claudio, the young Carib, entered the garden and wormed his way, not without observation, to his employer’s side. The nightshirt, long, immaculate, had been discarded; and the lad was now clothed with a taste that was almost severe. Upon his head was a blue cap with the word “Captain” printed boldly above the peak. For the rest, he wore a pair of trousers with enough material in them to make possibly a handkerchief of ordinary size.

“Señor Manuel,” he said, “all is ready. The net and the tools and the provisions are all packed away, and I am ready to sail quick—very quick. Also my dugout, the one you bought, is ready to bring you out.”

“Manuel, I think I will raise your wages. Hallo! what’s the excitement?”

This question was provoked by the sudden reappearance of the best man, whose face was flushed with excitement. In his hand he still held the five-dollar bill.

“Well, what’s the matter?”

“Don Enrico says he will come in a minute and explain. He says for you to wait. He will come soon.”

“But where’s the rum?”

“He will not sell you the rum.”

“Oh, he won’t! Well the nerve of him! Why not?”

“Because this money is Confederate money.”

VIII

The breakfast came to a sudden pause; men and women looked questioningly into each other’s faces. Manuel blanched.

“I do not understand,” he said after a pause.

“But Don Enrico—a very wise man—he does understand. He say that years ago there came here a Southern soldier before the end of the war. That soldier he buy the cay you bought yesterday. He live there. He brought with him a lot of Confederate money, and said he would keep it till the South States beat the North States. But they did not do it, and that money of the South States is not better than counterfeit money.”

At the word counterfeit intelligence showed itself on all sides. Now they understood. Manuel was a fraud; he had imposed upon all of them.

The boy himself unconsciously helped in confirming their dark suspicions. He grew ashen pale, his lips quivered, his head, buried in his hands, sank upon the table.

“Robber!” muttered an old woman.

“Swindler!” said a second one in a louder voice.

“Thief!” cried a third.

“And who,” said the leading needlewoman, “is to pay us for our sewing?”

Manuel raised his head; his eyes were filled with terror. All his self-possession had deserted him.

The sight of his terror-stricken face added fuel to the flame.

“Thief! Robber!” These and terms even more opprobrious were hurled at him from every side.

Manuel opened his mouth to speak, but the words failed to come.

One of the chicle gatherers inquired for a rope; and several of his fellows, with flashing knives and threatening gestures, started toward the hapless boy.

“Stop!” cried a clear, vibrant alto voice. That one word had the effect of a pistol shot.

Beside her husband, her head high in the air, her eyes scintillating, deep wrath upon her brow, towered Carmelita.

“You beasts!” she said. “You fools! You scum! How dare you think so of my husband?” As she uttered this last word, she turned and gazed with infinite pride and boundless love upon the cowering boy. Manuel’s head rose a trifle.

“He is worth more than all of you put together. He is honest, he is true. Yesterday we found this money. We thought it was good. We do not read much. But he is no thief; he is no robber. He is my man!”

As her voice mounted to a note of triumph in claiming Manuel for her own she threw her proud and ardent gaze upon him once more.

Manuel’s head was now erect. He returned her look, and at that moment it came home to him that the girl at his side was worth all the buried treasures in the world.

Then Manuel rose, a changed boy.

“Listen,” he said impressively. “You are everything my wife said—and more. I am done with you. Let not one of you ever put his foot upon my cay—Stanton Cay—without her permission. That treasure is all counterfeit; I care not. There is my treasure.”

Here Manuel put his arm about his wife; and she, trembling, blushing, hid her head upon his bosom. They had changed places again.

“As for the dress and the veil and the breakfast, I pay for them now. See!”

Manuel drew out of his pocket a handful of golden eagles.

“Pay yourselves!” he thundered, dashing them upon the earth.

Then he picked his wife up in his arms and, flashing upon them eyes that no one present dared to meet, walked proudly through them and made his way to the water.

Claudio, the young captain, was not slow to perceive the new program. Making his way after them, he broke into a run, jumped into his dugout, and paddled with all speed for *The Indian Maid*; so that when the proud groom and the trembling bride reached their vessel the anchor was at once weighed, and a few seconds later the vessel made ready to sail.

Meanwhile the wedding party, looking extremely puzzled and foolish, had come to the shore.

“You fool!” cried Don Enrico, hot from his shop.

“You’ve insulted the most wonderful young man. You have no sense.”

“What are we to do?” asked several.

“What’s the trouble?” asked Father Horn, who had been reciting his little hours in the church.

“They’ve insulted the two young people,” explained Don Enrico.

Father Horn turned his eyes on *The Indian Maid*. Standing erect, his eyes fastened with a great love upon her, Manuel was holding his trembling wife to his bosom. High up aloft, a little black cherub, divided into two sections by a band of white, was making great play with toes and fingers. It was a sight which embraced much of the comedy and much of the beauty of life.

“Bid them farewell,” cried Father Horn to the dumbfounded populace.

There was a revival of intelligence. The women took off their variously colored shawls and waved them; the men threw out their hands.

The stern face of Manuel melted. He whispered something to his wife, whereupon she raised her head and turned her blushing cheeks toward the shore. Carmelita smiled, whereat the men thus encouraged broke into cheers.

Then Carmelita whispered into her husband’s ear. He, nodding approval, addressed the crowd.

“My dear wife,” he called out, “invites all of you to come to Stanton Cay any time at all.”

The crowd became sunny and uproarious.

“Father Horn!” came the clear alto voice.

“Yes, my children.”

“Will your blessing reach this far?”

“We can try it,” answered the smiling priest, taking, as he spoke, a white stole from his pocket, and putting it about his neck.

Upon the deck of *The Indian Maid* knelt Manuel and Carmelita, their heads bowed, their hands clasped. Almost as quickly the people on the shore went to their knees. The Carib captain, perched high aloft, was puzzled for a moment. He could not well kneel; so he did the next best thing, as it seemed to him, and hung by both knees from the yard-arm.

Then in clear, sweet tones, tones vibrant with love for souls, the priest, making the sign of the cross, said:

“May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, descend upon you and remain with you forever.”

Then up rose Manuel and caught his wife in his arms, and, for the first time, kissed her; up rose the people and shouted for joy; down dropped the Carib captain, alighting, by a miracle, on his feet, and with him the sail, which at that moment took the very breeze that played in Eden when the first couple pledged mutual love and faithfulness to the end.

“And now, my children,” cried Don Enrico, that amazed expression still on his mahogany face, “go back. They are gone. But the wedding breakfast

remains, and it is paid for.”

With laugh and shout these children of nature hastened back to Don Enrico’s garden; while sailing into the golden west, with one black cherub gazing on with rounded eyes, went the happy pair, rich beyond count in each other’s youthful love.

ADA MERTON

ADA MERTON

CHAPTER I

*And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow and for ever.*

—Robert Browning.

ABOUT three o'clock of a spring afternoon, in one of the mansions which many years ago made Grand Avenue the finest residence street of St.

Louis, a lady was seated in a luxuriously furnished boudoir. She was a queenly woman. Her forehead, low and broad, and her deep dark eyes wore an expression which denoted thought and study. Her face and clear complexion would lead the casual observer to judge her younger than she really was. This youthfulness of feature, however, was not at its best on the present occasion; for the nervous play of her fingers as she sat reading, and, now and then a sharp turn of the head indicated that she was disturbed and ill at ease. At every unwonted sound from without, she would rise quickly, and gaze eagerly out of the open window. But each time her look of disappointment deepened, and with the suspicion of a sigh she would resume her volume. She had been reading for some time without interruption, when the sound of the bells from the Redemptorist church hard by broke upon the stillness of the afternoon.

"O, those bells, those bells, those *meaningless* bells!" she exclaimed.

Were they meaningless? The wish is often father to the thought. At all events, there was a time when to her those bells were full of meaning; a time when at their call she hastened away cheerily in rain or shine, through mist or snow, to worship a God whose existence she now denied. She was wiser to-day; so was Eve after partaking of the forbidden fruit. She was unhappier, too, for her added knowledge; so was Eve for hers. And yet why should she be unhappy? Her husband was as loving and attentive as heart could desire, and her only child—her little daughter Ada! Surely, nature herself was divine that she could produce a being so lovely, so complete. With such a husband and such a daughter, there should be a heaven upon earth. And yet—

The opening of the gate below distracted her from her reverie, and, as she hastened to the window, her face lighted up with joy at sight of Mr. John Merton, her husband. Quickly descending the stairs, she met him in the vestibule, kissed him with affectionate welcome, and helped him off with his overcoat.

“It is Spring outside, and it is Spring within too, Mary. Your welcome is as bright as the flowers. It is such a relief from the busy, gruff, money-making people on ‘Change.’ But where is my little Ada?”

“She has not come home yet, John. Indeed, I feel somewhat worried about her; for school should have let out over half an hour ago.”

“You know what care killed, Mary,” said Mr. Merton, as they went up the stairs; “leave her alone, and she’ll come home, like little Bo Peep who lost her sheep, you know.”

“Of course, it is foolish for me to worry, John; but when either you or Ada do not come back when I am expecting you, I can’t help getting alarmed. I suffer from a sort of waking nightmare, and cannot keep myself from imagining all manner of dreadful things.”

“When you feel that way, my dear, you should read some humorous book, or go down stairs and tell the cook your honest opinion of the last meal, or fatigue your mind by reading, let us say, the ‘Duchess.’ ”

These suggestions delivered in an offhand, careless manner brought a smile upon Mrs. Merton’s face, and the husband, satisfied with the cheering effect of his remarks, took an easy chair, and composed himself to look over the evening paper.

He was nearing forty years of age. His face while masculine was singularly regular, and his well-trimmed moustache, his fashionable apparel and his studied yet easy carriage made it clear that he was by no means indifferent to his personal appearance.

“Mary,” he resumed after a hasty survey of the paper’s headlines, “I’ve been thinking seriously about Ada all day. Now really, my dear, is it not about time for us to take her in hand ourselves, and open her eyes to the truth? She is now going on eleven, and, I believe, quite intelligent enough to understand our position, if it only be put before her in the proper light.”

Although Mrs. Merton continued to smile, a slight shade of sadness clouded her face, as she replied, “I, too, John, have been thinking on this very point for some time past; and still I do not see my way to taking your view of the case. Ada is young, and apt to be led rather by authority than by reason, as is proper in all innocent little children. And besides, let us practice what we preach. We both believe in liberty of thought; now why not let the child follow

her own honest convictions? Suppose she continue going to the sisters' school for a year or two more. Even then she will not be over thirteen, and at that time we can easily appeal to her reason, and show her that not everything taught by the good sisters is to be blindly believed."

"But why not send her to a non-Catholic, or better a sectarian school?" urged Mr. Merton. "I should prefer that she learn Protestant doctrine."

"That remark is scarcely worthy of you, my dear," answered Mrs. Merton with a slight touch of scorn in her tones. "Learn Protestant doctrine! I fear she would become gray before learning what Protestant doctrine really is—or isn't. As you have often said, everything that the sects believe is to be referred back to our—to the Catholic Church, as to the fountainhead. You may smile, John, but if I did believe in God, as was the case one year ago, I would live as a Catholic; for it is the only religion that seems to be at all consistent."

"See here, Mary," said Mr. Merton, straightening himself in his chair, and gazing fixedly into her eyes, "please do not talk in that fashion. One would think you were falling back."

"No: I burnt my ships long ago. I had what they call 'faith' once, and I thought then that I should never lose it. But now even in the face of death, I would never think of appealing to a God, or returning to a religion which I put aside under your guidance and teaching. Not only do I no longer believe, but I no longer even wish to believe."

Mr. Merton arose with a smile of triumph, and drew his wife to him.

"Bravely said, my dear one," he exclaimed. "What you have said rings true; and your looks were in accord with your words. When I married you, Mary, I resolved at first, and kept my resolve for some time, not to interfere with your faith. I went on the good old-fashioned principle of letting well enough alone. But as I came to love you more and more, I felt jealous that you should have any reserves in your love for me, giving half to me, and half to an imaginary God. After the birth of our little Ada, this feeling bothered me more and more. You cannot imagine, I sincerely believe, how it vexed and annoyed me when you would leave my side of a morning to go and attend early Mass: and so, after five or six years of silent objection, I resolved that it was about time to open your eyes. But it wasn't quite so easy a task."

"No, indeed," assented Mrs. Merton.

"I thought you would see the truth just as soon as I put it to you, whereas for a long time you fought against me with all the subtlety of a Jesuit: And I was very glad at the end of three long years that at last my words and arguments were beginning to make an impression on you. But now that you have declared you no longer even wish to believe, I think that my victory is

crowned. Henceforth, I shall never doubt you.”

Mrs. Merton’s face flushed with pleasure. Words of praise are ever welcome; but when they come from those who are highest and dearest in our estimation, they receive an added value in the love of the giver. Mr. Merton was not slow to observe the effect of his words, and, resolved on gaining his point, continued:—

“And by the way, Mary, there’s one thing yet I think you ought to attend to without further delay. Why not let Ada know that you are no longer a Catholic?”

Mrs. Merton was about to reply but checked herself, as the patter of a light footstep was heard upon the stairs.

CHAPTER II

*Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax;
Her cheek as the dawn of day;
Her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.*

—Longfellow.

ADA MERTON—for she it was—resembled her mother as the rose-bud resembles the rose. She was prettily attired, in a fashion which manifested a fond mother's care and taste at once. Ada's beautiful face was made more winning by her blue eyes. These windows of the soul revealed to all who gazed into their innocent depths the lovely history of a short, but pure, holy, and joyful life; of a shining soul beautiful still with the unsullied robe of baptism, and enriched by the precious graces which come at the call and prayer of Christ's well-beloved little ones. In every feature dwelt that look of happiness which springs from innocence that has no dark memories in the past, and that sees no black shadows in the future. It was a look of happiness which slipped so easily into the radiant smile, that it were difficult to distinguish the point of transition. No one could come into contact with Ada without loving the child; no one could love her without loving at the same time the sweet innocence which made and kept her what she was.

On entering the room, she kissed her father with eager affection, then turned to her mother, who folded her to her bosom in the good old-fashioned way which all fond mothers, I doubt not, have kept up by a natural tradition since the days of mother Eve.

"You are late, my little pet," cried Mrs. Merton.

"Yes, mamma; but Sister Felicitas asked me to stay after school, and I've got such good news.—O! I am sure you will hardly believe it."

"What is it, darling?" asked the mother with much sympathetic interest in her voice, as she drew Ada to her side, and gently stroked the child's fair tresses.

Ada smiled, shook her head with an air of mystery, and pointed to Mr. Merton who, apparently unconscious of this bit of by-play, was again reading the paper.

"I'm afraid papa won't like to hear it," she said in a whisper.

"Just imagine that I'm down town," broke in the father, who had not been so engrossed with the paper as Ada had supposed. "Count me out for this time, Ada, and tell mamma what you please. Even if I do happen to overhear it, I

promise not to have it published.”

“Now, papa, there you are making fun of me, as if anyone would care about publishing anything I have to say. But, papa, I shall tell you too, only I hope you won’t be angry.”

“If you wish it, Ada, I will count a hundred before I say a word. Go on now, with your news. Shall I count?”

Ada with a puzzled expression cast an enquiring eye upon her father, who met her gaze with a face of the utmost gravity; but judging from her mother’s laugh that he was quizzing her, went on:

“Well, first of all, after class this afternoon Sister Felicitas examined me in my catechism; and I didn’t miss but less than half of a question in half an hour.”

“O, that’s your news is it?” cried the father. “Well, I congratulate my little girl most heartily. To have a fine memory is a great advantage, and the learning of the catechism word for word, while it is an excellent test of the memory, is also one of the best exercises for developing it.”

Mrs. Merton, as her husband spoke, was watching Ada’s countenance.

“That is not your news, Ada,” she said, “though it is very good news too. What else, dear?”

“Well, mamma, Sister Felicitas was very much pleased, and told me that I might join the class that is preparing for the first Communion.”

“The deuce!” muttered Mr. Merton, throwing aside his paper with a start and a frown; “this *is* news.” And he bit his lip, and began pulling at his mustache.

“But, Ada,” said the mother, whose face to the eager eyes of the child seemed disappointingly cold, “you are much too young: you must wait till you are twelve. ‘Birdie, wait a little longer, till the little wings are stronger.’ ” She added the quotation from the poet in a playful tone; for she saw how pained was the child at her first words. But Ada was not to be diverted into playfulness on *this* subject.

“O mamma!” she said with voice so appealing and face so pitiful, that Mrs. Merton could not withstand her silent eloquence.

“Well, darling, I can’t disappoint you: have your own way.”

Ada’s face glowed with pleasure.

“Stuff—nonsense—superstition—humbug,” muttered in an almost inaudible growl the husband from the sofa.

“See here, papa,” said Ada with her beautiful smile and with her little

forefinger raised in an admonitory manner, "you just keep quiet for a while, and I'll pray and pray till you believe just exactly the same as mamma and I. Won't he, mamma?"

"Yes, dearest: I hope we shall all believe the same thing soon."

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the negro porter, who in addition to his other duties had the proud charge of escorting Ada to and from school. He was an old servant in the family, as was indeed very evident.

With a gesture of greeting to his master and mistress which was a compromise between a nod and a bow, Bob straightened up, put on a very serious look which lasted for but a moment, and then burst into the happiest of smiles.

"What's the matter, Bob?" asked Mr. Merton. "Have you good news, too?"

"She's done tole you," chuckled Bob, rubbing his hands. "Mebbe she ain't a smart little one. O no! Now, Massah, ain' she done tole you bof?"

"Told us what?" asked the master of the house, who, brought up in the slave days under Bob's personal care, allowed the old negro many liberties.

"Why, dat she's a-gwine fur to make her fust Communion. She done tole me all about it, comin' heah from school. An' she's de happies' little gal in de whole city of St. Louis. Bless her heart, I'se willin' fer to bet dat ef she had a nice par o' wings on her, she'd make just as lubly an angel as you can cotch flyin' 'roun' de golden street."

Ada laughed, and Bob gazed at her with serio-comical indignation. Mr. Merton was amused.

"So," queried Mr. Merton quizzingly, "you believe that angels have wings, do you?"

"Cose I does," answered the negro with energy and respectful indignation. "I'se no cognostic like some people I knows, who don' blieve in nuffin 'cept what dey sees. I'se got religion; an' I tell you what, Massa Mutton, you'se gwine to git lef' some o' dese fine days, sho's de Lawd made little apples. As de good book says, 'you mus' be a lubber ob de Lawd, or you nebber git to hebben when yo' die.'" Bob emphasized the quotation by setting it to a peculiar nasal but musical monotone, and rolling the whites of his eyes in a manner peculiar to gentlemen of his color when unusually devout.

"Quite a respectable homily, Bob," returned his master. "But is this all you came to see me about?"

"Da's a fac'; I kem mighty neah fergitten to ax yo' ef you want de bay hosses or de oder par hitched up."

“Take the bays, Bob.”

“En I clean forgot about de new ha’nness. It has jist come. Yo’ like to see it?”

“Ah! has it? You bring your real news last, as a woman puts the point of her letter into the postscript.—Well, my dears, if you excuse me for a minute or two, I shall go to see what sort of taste Bob has in the choice of harness.” And Mr. Merton followed by his sable spiritual admonitor left the room. No sooner was the door closed upon them, then Ada turned to her mother with a look of wistfulness and trouble.

“I wonder, mamma, whether it is not my sins that keep papa from knowing and loving God?”

“Not yours, dearest,” answered Mrs. Merton, drawing the child close, and fondling her with hungry tenderness.

“I hope not,” pursued Ada; “for I am trying my very best to do nothing wrong. I say a pair of beads every day for poor papa, and during the consecration at Mass, I always think of him.”

“That is so like my little girl,” said the mother still fondling the child, and struggling hard against an uneasy feeling, which often came upon her during such colloquies with Ada;—a feeling all the more distressing that she was unable to analyse it. “Your father and I are always very happy when we see how much you love us. But tell me, my little darling, do you think you would love me and papa still more, if you did not know that there was a God?”

Ada’s smile left her, and a look of dismay came upon her mobile countenance.

“Why, mama, that is nonsense, isn’t it? It sounds so strange! And just a while ago when I told you about my being allowed to make my first Communion, you almost scared me, mamma; and I felt like shivering.”

“I scare you, Ada!”

“Yes, mamma: I expected you to be so glad, and instead there was a sort of a look on your face—I don’t know what it was,—but it was not glad; and I felt so surprised and sorry. I could not help thinking that you were angry with me.”

“With you, my pet? No, indeed, Ada; I was not, I could not be angry with you.”

“Well, then, mamma, you were vexed that I was going to make my first Communion this year.”

“Oh, but that is quite another thing, dear. You are right, Ada. I don’t like it. You see, I think that if you waited another year, you would be older,—and often it is better to wait a year or two than go to Communion without knowing

well and clearly what you are doing.”

“But, mamma, do you think that I am too young to know what I am doing?”

Mrs. Merton paused before replying. She tried to be truthful with her child, and, with the single exception of her change of faith, she was wont to answer every question frankly.

“Well, my dear, many people hold that it is not good for most children to go to Holy Communion till they are over twelve. Then they are more developed, and more in earnest.”

“And was that your only reason for not being glad, mamma; just because you wanted me to be better prepared?”

“N—no. But I do not care to tell my little girl the other reason: she is too young to understand it. But you mustn’t try to be a saint all at once.” Mrs. Merton uttered this last remark in such a way that it was hard to say whether she spoke in jest or earnest. It was meant to be tentative.

“Of course, I’m going to try to be a saint! we all must try to be that. Sister Felicitas said in class the other day that Our Lord wants every one of us to be saints.”

“Nonsense!”—Here Mrs. Merton checked herself and added more mildly, “I suppose Sister Felicitas doesn’t mean everything that she says.”

In spite of herself, Ada could not hide the chilling effect which these words had upon her. The mother saw that she had scandalized her child, and involuntarily the terrible words of Christ denouncing those who scandalize His little ones recurred to her.

“I am sure, mamma,” answered Ada recovering herself partially, “that you would not speak so of Sister Felicitas if you knew her. All the girls in our class love her, and think she is a real saint. I pray that I may become like her.”

“Now, now, Ada, you are not thinking of becoming a nun, are you?”

“O, I don’t think so far off as that,” answered Ada dreamily. “But all I mean is that I’m trying to be good and gentle like Sister Felicitas. She often tells us to act always as if we saw our guardian angel beside us. Don’t you often think of your guardian angel, mamma?”

“Why, child, what strange questions you ask: of course, I think of him—sometimes.” Mrs. Merton was treading on dangerous ground. As she answered, her face flushed, and she turned away her eyes.

“Do you?” cried Ada with a look of gladness. “So do I often, mamma: and, do you know, sometimes it seems to me that, if I keep myself free from sin and from all wilful faults, God may let me see my angel before I die.”

“I see my angel every day,” rejoined Mrs. Merton, playfully yet in full earnest. “For you, my little one, are my dear angel; and you, my little one, are always showing me the way to heaven.”

Ada was puzzled. She would have been pained had she known what her mother meant by the word “heaven.” That word on Mrs. Merton’s lips bore no reference to the land beyond.

“But come, my dear,” added Mrs. Merton. “I see the carriage is waiting: let us not delay your father.”

CHAPTER III

*For even as ruin is wrought by rain,
Beating hard on the mellowing crops,
Making the labor of farmers vain,
Smiting and blighting the barley tops,
So is wrack in the souls of men
Wrought by passion, desire and sin.*

C. J. C.

WHILE the Mertons are driving along the fine boulevards of Forest Park, then, as now, the chosen driving resort of St. Louisans, it will be well for the reader to learn something of Mr. and Mrs. Merton's antecedents.

John Merton was the son of wealthy Catholic parents. As far as they were Catholic, it was good for John; as far as they were wealthy, it was bad. While not prepared to assert absolutely that wealthy parents, because they are wealthy, are a misfortune to a boy, the present writer humbly submits that in the generality of cases they are. In one of his stories for boys—Maurice Francis Egan makes the following remark, which it is well for those having care of the young to bear in mind:—"When a boy has a comfortable home and everybody is kind to him, and clothes and food and warmth and books seem to come as a matter of course, he will probably become selfish without knowing it." John Merton was, at the age of fourteen, light-hearted, gay, witty, perfectly good-natured and perfectly selfish. His good traits were recognized by everyone, but I doubt whether any true friend, brushing aside the exterior qualities which make many a boy lovely to eyes that see not beneath the surface, ever endeavored to reveal to the boy his inner self; to show him how he never turned his hand, took one thought, formulated a single wish, which in some way or other was not to turn to his immediate account. On the other hand, his parents, as I have said, were Catholic, and, according to the usual standard, good Catholics at that. The mother was really devout; she trained her boy carefully in his religion and in his duties; and, if she were blind to his defective character, let us pardon this fault of blindness which loses much of its reproach and even takes on a certain sweetness in the holy light of a mother's tender love. She died when John was fifteen, and one year later her husband followed her. John's father was a business man first, and a Catholic second. Accordingly, he left his son in the charge of a person who was noted for his qualities as a financier. True, the guardian had no religion at all; but, to the man who puts business first, religion second, such a consideration, to use his own figure, "does not cut much of a figure." Shortly after the death of his father, John was sent to a boarding school. It was fashionable: the rest is not

written. If along with his religious training young Merton had had a little manliness, he might have practiced his religion even in these unhealthy surroundings. But he had just that amount of manliness, which we expect to find in people who are thoroughly selfish, and thoroughly good-natured. He called himself a Catholic, when there was no escaping the admission—that was the extent of his religion. Allowed a liberal supply of pocket-money, he spent lavishly; so that, very soon, he was quite barnacled with friends. In a short time, Merton's freedom extended itself even to his conversation. Then, it went to his reading. The French novel, the infidel pamphlet, books free in tone, independent of all canons, whether of taste or of thought or of logic,—such had now become his mental food. We may pass over in silence the next two or three years. John was perfectly respectable—which, being interpreted, means that he dressed well, had a good manner, and, as to the rest, was not found out. Now a sinful life such as he was leading is bound to cloud the mind. It is no wonder, then, that he soon ceased to entertain any belief in a place of eternal torments; no wonder that he soon lost, to all intents and purposes, the faith which he had received in baptism, and strengthened through the sacraments of his church. If there is anything that clouds the intellect, dulls it to all that is highest and noblest, and crushes into silence and insensibility the conscience which once was quiveringly delicate, it is the deadly enervating, baneful fume of impure thoughts. To men thus poisoned, however aesthetic they may be in regard to sensuous beauty, to sight, to sound, to color, to taste, to fragrance, yet they cannot rise with their wingless thoughts to the super-sensible. They remind one of flies in a jar of honey—in a sweetness which cannot last, from which they cannot rise, which is to be their destruction. To men of this kind the high and holy doctrine of the Incarnation and the Redemption seem as some childish fairy tale. How far John Merton's excesses would have led him, it is impossible to say, had he not, fortunately, conceived a strong love for Miss Arden, at that time one of the leading *débutantes* in St. Louis society. It was not generally known that he was an infidel. Miss Arden had not the least suspicion. Hence, after a short period of wooing, he succeeded with but small difficulty in gaining his suit; and Miss Arden, without knowing aught of the inner life of him to whom she was to cleave in sorrow and in joy, in life and until death, surrendered herself blindly to be his helpmate for better or for worse. These things are done every day.

Mrs. Merton, at this time, united in herself a strong love for religion, and a strong love for the world. They were seemingly parallel lines in her character. On the face of it, one would think that two such loves could not co-exist. But we cannot argue against facts. Worldliness and religion sometimes go together—they are dangerous neighbors, and however parallel they seem to be they are likely in the long run to cross each other. Then one or the other must give.

She had always been a devout girl; but like many of her class she had compromised with her conscience on the one question of worldliness. After the first years of marriage, her husband undertook to inform her of his religious views. She was shocked, and the revulsion of feeling made her, for a time, more devout than ever before. She eagerly essayed to convince her husband of his errors; but the young infidel, or agnostic, as he called himself, was, to do him justice, far better armed on his side of the controversy than she on hers, and soon silenced her strongest arguments.

Years passed on, and the vantage-ground of battle had changed. Merton plied his wife with infidel books; he assembled about his table men of culture, but of no belief; he enkindled in his wife, by subtle means, the desire of becoming a queen in society. His temptations succeeded but too well. Mary Merton began to neglect the sacraments;—the theatre on Saturday night and Communion on Sunday morning do not appear to have a very natural connection. Nor was it long before she arrived at the conclusion that, to retain her hold in fashionable circles, Lent could hardly be kept as a season of penance. Following this, her Easter duties were neglected; and so the miserable, worldly woman found herself in the same situation as her husband has been years before—anxious to believe there was no hell.

Bravely did John Merton come to the rescue; and, at the time that our story opens, she had been one year an unbeliever. In the meantime, little Ada happily ignorant of her mother's defection was attending a convent school, and growing more and more saint-like every day.

Husband and wife were devotedly attached to each other. They had but one life (so they believed) and they would make the most of it: they had the actual "acre of Middlesex," and laughed at the "principality of Utopia." In loving each other and seeking each other's comfort, they had staked their happiness. The progress of Ada in mind and body was the one other grand object of their lives. So far they had been happy. Their heaven upon earth seemed to be flawless. But since the days that men wandered from God and walked in their own ways, since the days that the peoples of the earth boldly raised the proud head of Babel up into the very face of the heavens, thousands and millions of erring mortals have attempted to build their heaven upon this earth, only to hear in the heyday of their joy;

"The house was builded of the earth,
And shall fall again to ground."

CHAPTER IV

"I have at home a flawless diamond ring."

"And I a jewel that would grace a king."

"Better than both," there came a third voice mild,

"I have at home a sinless little child."

—Anon.

*More things are wrought by prayer than this
world dreams of.*

—Tennyson.

AS Ada alighted from the carriage, on their return from Forest Park, there was a pensive, bewildered, half-frightened air about the little child. She could not bring herself to dwell upon it, and yet the thought would come that her father had shocked her. He had spoken more plainly than was his wont; he had openly derided practices and beliefs which were most sacred to her; and twist it and turn it as she might, she could not interpret favorably her father's conduct. Her mother, too, though not siding with Mr. Merton, had protested so faintly as almost to countenance his remarks.

The poor child loved her parents intensely; and it is the words of those we love which inflict the deepest pain. Some writers tell us that the heart given to God is selfish and narrow, cares nothing for relatives and friends, and offers all that is nearest and dearest on the shrine of eternal love. They go on to instance what they are pleased to call the proverbial "coldness" of monks and nuns; and assert that by rule a religious is obliged to "hate father and mother." These assertions are about as close to the truth as that of another class of writers who insist that as a rule the monk or the nun is in religion on account of blighted affection. As a matter of fact, when we love God as He desires us, we love all things else in Him and for Him. The most affectionate hearts, the truest souls, the noblest lives are to be found under the veil of the nun or the habit of the religious. "As radiancy," says Cardinal Manning, "is a part of light, so the love of mankind flows in a direct stream from the love of God. In the measure in which we love God, in that measure we shall have more heart-felt love to all that are about us. A father will be a better father, and a mother a better mother; son and daughter will be better children; they will love each other more, and friends will love one another more in the measure in which they love God more."

So Ada in loving her Creator clung all the closer to her parents, and the one sorrow of her young and gracious life was now beginning, inasmuch as she could no longer disguise from herself the fact that while her father openly

flouted her most sacred and cherished beliefs, her mother repelled the child's confidences with a coldness which could not be misunderstood.

After supper that evening, Mr. and Mrs. Merton went out to attend an evening reception, leaving Ada to the solitude of her little room. It was on the same floor as were the apartments of her parents, but looking towards the west so as to command an extensive view of the beautiful suburbs of the city, and away beyond them the green fields, the early corn, and shady forests of the country, with here and there a cosy little farmhouse. The room was beautifully fitted up. About the walls hung pictures of our thorn-crowned Saviour, his sorrowful Mother, and the sweet, virgin-wreathed St. Agnes. Next to a book-case filled with choice volumes, many of them written expressly for the young, was Ada's study desk; above which was a shrine, blooming and fragrant with flowers, in honor of the Sacred Heart.

Beside the desk was a dainty *prie-dieu*, upon which lay a silver crucifix—the child's dearest treasure. Kneeling down, and kissing the crucifix with tender reverence, Ada remained for a few moments in earnest prayer. Then rising, she seated herself at her desk, and began her studies for the following day's class. The little girl possessed fine talent, and (a thing which does not always accompany that gift) she loved her books. She had been working for over an hour, when she was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"O, is it you, Maggie?" she exclaimed, as her maid entered, "I'm glad you have come; for I was wishing to tell you the good news. Sit down."

"The good news, is it?" said Maggie her ruddy kind face breaking into a perfect sun-burst of smiles. "Now, what is it, my dear girl?"

"I am going to make my first Communion next Easter, Maggie."

"Are you, now? Well, sure, I'm delighted to hear it, and I'd just like to see any one deny it." Here Maggie, who without prejudice to her honest, kindly nature, might be described as a good-natured maid of a staccato temperament, looked around with momentary asperity to catch the inaudible protest of some imaginary opponent. "And, darling," she continued, breaking into a smile again, "how did your father like it?"

The smile died away from Ada's face. "O Maggie," she cried, "he was so vexed, and looked displeased all the time we were out driving. And I had thought mamma would be so glad; and instead she seemed to be put out almost as much as papa."

"Now, was she, alannah?" said Maggie soothingly, her honest cherry complexion glowing like a cloud of evening in the western sky; "she's been reading more of that grinning monkey of a French philosopher, Vulture—or some such carrion, heathenish name—I suppose. May the devil fly away with

those infernal books against faith—God forgive me for saying of the same, and for bringing such an ugly subject into this here little room, where there’s a sweeter, holier, lovelier little heart, than those heathenish writers ever dreamt of, since the days they were weaned which was a great pity all around, seeing as they should never have grown up at all. There now, Miss Ada,” she concluded, having equally expended her breath and her indignation, “I’ve said my say out, and I’d like to see anybody unsay it.” This peroration, begun with swelling veins and snapping eyes, was no sooner ended than Maggie lapsed into her wonted state of unindignant benevolence.

“Do you think mamma reads many books against faith, Maggie?” and the poor girl’s face quivered with pain in fear of the answer.

“Do she,” answered Maggie, who, in an unusual state of warmth, was wont to become more and more rudimentary in her language, “she does be reading them agnostuck writers all the time; and that grand Turk your father—Lord forgive me for saying so, but, as far as faith goes, he might as well be a Turk as not, and nobody any the wiser—he buys her them books faster than she can read ’em. But why are you crying, Ada?”

The child leaned her head upon her old nurse’s bosom, and for a few moments sobbed.

“Poor, dear, little Ada,” said Maggie in softened tones, “it’s a shame for me to be talking the way I do. Instead of cheering and consoling the darling little girl I learned to walk and used to carry about in my arms, here I come like a tattooed Hottentot with my cock and bull stories, a-making things ten times worse than they are—cheer up, alannah, now do—you’re father isn’t half as much a Turk as I am.”

“Ah, Maggie, it makes me so sad, thinking that my father doesn’t love nor care for the dear Saviour who died for him; and mamma, too, though she believes, doesn’t seem to love God at all.”

“That’s all true, my darling, all the truth, and nothing else *but* the truth,” Maggie returned, with some dim memory of an oath she had once heard administered in court. “But we can pray for them, and if we pray enough we’re bound to be heard.”

“Yes, Maggie; but I have prayed so long; day and night I have prayed to the Heart that is so full of graces, and yet my prayers seem not to be heard.”

“Wait a little, darling. Patience and perseverance will bring a snail to Jerusalem. And I’ll pray with you, and we will keep on praying till both your pa and your ma believe in God, and all His holy truths—which they will of course sooner or later—and I’d like to see anybody say they wouldn’t, now!”

“Well, Maggie, we will pray as hard as we can. And don’t forget to ask the

Infant Jesus to keep me from all sin so that when He comes to me in Holy Communion, He may feel perfectly at home. Good night, Maggie.”

Upon Maggie’s departure, Ada having extinguished her light, walked to her window and stood gazing upon the calm and clear night. The moon was just appearing in the heavens, and a thousand stars were performing the magnificent course, from which they had never departed, since their Creator had said, “Let there be light.” A few dark clouds, like wandering spirits, were moving along obscuring, here and there, the jewelled bosom of the firmament; scarce a sound invaded the stillness of nature’s repose. And as Ada surveyed the heavens, thoughts born of the tranquil beauty of the night passed through her mind. She wondered whether it was not at such a time as this that the fertile plain of Judea shone in the light of glory, and the bright angels of the heavenly band brought tidings of joy to all the nations; whether it is not at such a time as this that the same glad spirits still continue, though veiled from our eyes, to carry messages of love from the throne of Divine peace to the troubled hearts of men; whether even now among these myriad envoys of heaven there might not be one who bore some powerful grace to her hapless parents. Nature to her was an endless book of beauty. Every creature of the great God raised her soul to Him and His imperishable home. Breathing a sigh, she turned, after a few moments, to her *prie-dieu*, and earnestly prayed for father and mother, who little dreaming of their Ada’s vigil, were following their round of pleasure. She told her beads; then recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin—all for her parents. Finally, with arms outstretched and unsupported, she continued her prayers, thinking at the same time of Him who for three long weary hours prayed in the same position upon the Cross. And as she persevered in prayer, the moon rose slowly higher in the sky, and flecked the room with silver bars, and threw a bright mantle of glory around the fragile form of the praying child.

CHAPTER V

*Kind gifts to some, kind words to more,
Kind looks to each and all she gave,
Which on with them through life they bore,
And down into their grave.*

—Aubrey De Vere.

GOOD by, my dear, and be sure not to be late coming home.”

“Good by, mamma,” answered Ada as, kissing her mother, she set off, satchel in hand, to school, under the charge of master Bob.

“Missy Ada,” said Bob when they had gained the street, “how does it come dat some folks is drefful pooah, while odders is just a rollin’ in de lap of luggery?”

“Why, Bob, would you like to see one person just as rich as another?”

“Dat’s jist de way to put it, Missy Ada. I’s jist as good as de mos’ white trash wot I knows of.”

“Never mind, Bob, if you be a good man, you’ll be better off in the next world than a good many of the ‘white trash.’ ”

“Well, I *is drefful* good. I s’pect I habn’t done nuffin bad, sence I’s been a-working for your pa who am a fuss class massa, ‘cep’ he don’t blieve nuffin he can’t see. Why, if you go in a rest—rest.”—Here Bob paused and made that head-gesture usually indicative of jogging the memory. Suddenly the forgotten word sprang from the recesses of his hidden lore like a verbal Minerva.—“Ah, into a resturent, ef you go into a resturent, you ain’t a gwine to see nuffin on de table ‘cep’ de castors—‘cos de dinnah am in de ketchin. Now it ud jest be like your pa to walk out o’ dat resturent, as chockfull o’ emptiness as he kem in, ‘cos he don’t blieve in no dinner dat he can’t see—Dat,” added Bob in a low, mysterious tone, as though he were imparting a secret of no common value, —“dat, Missy Ada, is all de doctrine of de cognostics.”

“What is?” asked Ada.

“Why, dat dey don’t blieve nuffin dat dey don’t see. But dese matters is too perfound fo’ you, Missy Ada, darefore, let’s drop him. I’s kine o’ sorry, Missy, we wont go to school togedder in de nex’ world nor eber see each udder.”

“Why, Bob,” Ada enquired, her eyes brightening with merriment, “don’t you think I have a chance for heaven?”

“Cose; but you goes to de white tr——, white folks’ hebben; an’ de Lawd will send ole Bob among de cullud pussons.”

"You're talking nonsense now, Bob. How can you believe such things as that?"

"Well, you see, Missy Ada, I'se a shoutin Meffodis', an' hab de right to blieve what I like. Now from wot I hab seen, I'se 'cluded dat de Lawd ain't a gwine to mix people in de new Jooslem. You 'member Massa Stanley, de grain spekeltater? He done your pa out o' a heap o' money, an' robbed lots o' pooah folk. Wen he committed suicide, he was wuff a million dollahs, an' all de big folk went to his funral. I was dar, an when de preacher said dat we was all jussified by faith, an' dat massa Stanley was a singin' Glory Yallowlooyer wid de angels, I says to myself, I says;—'de Lawd ain't goin' to make pooah 'spectable niggah man 'sociate with sech bad men as *dat*.' So I'se excluded, Missy Ada, dat cullud pussons is gwine to hab annuder hebben."

"I'm afraid, Bob, that your religion is not the right one; but some day, please God, you will become a good Catholic."

"I dunno', Missy Ada, but what I will. I 'clar' 'fore hebben, Missy, when I sees you so good an' kine to pooah black niggah like me, an' sees you so good an' lubbin' to all pooah folks, I jest feels all ober dat your 'ligion's de mos' 'spectable a-goin'."

"Very good, Bob, next Sunday I'm going to send you to a priest."

"I'se a willin', Missy."

Up to this point of their talk they had been advancing in the direction of the convent; but now, they turned aside, and proceeded towards a dilapidated hovel, standing lone on a large, open lot.

"Poor Mrs. Reardon!" said Ada, as they drew near the dwelling, "God sends her many trials."

"Dat's a fac'," answered Bob, "I wonder ef her old man is home. Ef he is, I reckon I'll tech him up a little."

"Now Bob," said Ada shaking her finger at him, "you mustn't do a thing unless I tell you."

They had reached the threshold, as they spoke, and it was impossible for them not to hear the sound of an angry, scolding voice within. As Ada knocked, the voice ceased, and a dead silence ensued. Not waiting for permission to come in, the child entered followed by Bob. A sad scene met their eyes. Mrs. Reardon a woman barely of middle age, whose hair had been already silvered by care and distress, stood by the door weeping: on a bed, in one corner of the room lay an emaciated boy of eight, his flushed cheeks and bright eyes betokening fever; and, supporting himself by clinging to a table, stood the master of the family, his beard and hair unkempt, his dress disordered and his eyes burning with a light common equally to drunkenness

and to insanity. As the new-comers entered the room, the little child smiled with pleasure, the woman dried her eyes, while the man turned away his bloated face for very shame.

“Good day, good day,” said Ada with a pleasant smile of greeting; “you have trouble this morning,” she added in a lower tone to Mrs. Reardon. “Poor woman, what a pity Mr. Reardon can’t keep from drinking.”

“God help me, Ada, but he was once as kind a husband as ever drew the breath of life. And now if you look at his miserable face you can see no sign of the manly, merry fellow he once was.”

“Ada!” cried the child from his bed, “I’m so glad to see you; come here, Ada, and tell me another of those beautiful stories.”

“And so, Georgie, you are still alive enough to care about my stories are you? Well, now, what shall it be?”

“Tell me something more about the angels, Ada.”

The girl thought for a moment, and then in a quiet, simple manner repeated to him, as she remembered it, one of Father Faber’s exquisite “Tales of the Angels.” The mother stood by listening with no less interest than her child; the miserable father, still balancing himself by means of the table, heard with growing shame of those blessed spirits than whom he had been created a little less; while master Bob divided his attention between bestowing a look of compassion upon the boy, lavishing frowns upon the master of the house, and lending an occasional ear to the story itself.

“Now, Georgie,” said Ada after the tale had been told, “it is time for me to go to school. But I have something nice for you—just the thing for a fever, mamma says.”

Ada took from her satchel two large oranges and a slice of cake. The grateful boy little knew, though he had been receiving such presents daily, that Ada was giving him—sacrificing to him—all the palatable dainties which Mrs. Merton had fondly destined for her daughter’s luncheon.

“Thank you, Ada, thank you a thousand times; I do so love oranges,” and the child’s eyes, even as he spoke, filled with happy tears.

“God bless you for a good angel,” said the mother: “and if my prayers can do such as you any good, you shall have them, and welcome.”

“Indeed, they will do me good: good morning, Georgie; good morning Mrs. Reardon.”

“Hold on, Missy Ada,” broke in Bob at this juncture, who felt that he had a duty to acquit himself of before society. “‘Fore you go, I want to impress my ‘pinion on this heah man. Isn’t you’ ashamed of youself, sah? What do you

mean, by comin' home to de family in sech a condition? You'se a bad man, and wants a soberin' up, an' dis chile's de man who knows how to tend to dat part of de business." And Mr. Bob picked up a convenient bucket of water, with the intention of giving its rightful owner the full benefit of the contents. But Reardon would not tamely submit to this; he made a rush at master Bob, and what would have ensued, it is impossible to say, had not Ada interposed her tiny person between the two.

"Now, Bob," she said, "what did I tell you before you came in? It's a shame for men to fight before women."

"Berry well, Missy, it ain't de right cose to fight afore women; an' I'se drefful shamed o' myself. Look heah, you one," he continued addressing his remarks to Reardon, "ef you'se a gwine to git cantankerous agin, while I'se around; I'll—I'll—spifficate you; and don't forgit it."

Reardon, ordinarily bold and fearless, was meek as a lamb before the amiable child visitor; and taking no notice of Bob's vituperative eloquence, at length summoned courage to speak to the girl.

"God forgive me, Miss Ada, for being the brute I am, with my child lying sick in bed, and my wife wasting her very life at work. I am worse than a brute. But pardon me this time, Miss Ada."

"Mr. Reardon," Ada answered, "I hope that you and I may become great friends yet; good morning, now; and Geordie, I hope you'll be better to-morrow." With these words, Ada left the house: master Bob stalked after her, muttering between his teeth, and shaking his head fiercely; after some time, however, he recovered his usual serenity, and his face became about as sunshiny as a gentlemen of color's can well become.

"Dat's a berry good woman, Missy Ada."

"Indeed she is, Bob; she has many hard things to bear in this world; but the good God will make up for her troubles in the next."

"De fac' is, Missy Ada, I'se no disjections to bein' in de same hebben as her," Bob continued after a moment's meditation. They had now reached the convent gate, and Bob took his departure.

CHAPTER VI

*Hide not the clouds among,
Brightest star and fairest,
Until her song those heavens along
Between thy wings thou bearest.*

—Aubrey De Vere.

*I sit to-night by the fire-light,
And I look at the glowing flame,
And I see in the bright red flashes
A Heart, a Face and a Name.*

—Abram J. Ryan.

JOHN MERTON, the course of whose financial affairs had thus far run smooth, happened about this period to become entangled in an unlucky speculation. Often of an evening would his wife wait for hours beyond his ordinary time of returning before he came home, jaded and taciturn. Instead of accompanying her to the various gay assemblages of society, at which they were both so welcome, he would plead business engagements, and absent himself till late in the night. On several of these occasions, Mrs. Merton noticed with distress, that he had sought solace in stimulants. Never had she spoken a reproachful word to him; and so she trembled in silent horror, fearing that this perhaps was but the shadow of the dark days to come. Was John, the cultured society man, the noble, high-souled gentleman, the loving husband—was *he* to court the demon of the glass? The thought was dreadful; and, as she sat by the fireside alone, and gazed into the crackling coals, dreadful pictures of broken household idols, blighted hopes, and life-long sorrows would project themselves in weird, elfin shapes among the glowing embers, or dance ghastly, vague, and fantastical upon the walls. Her infidel authors were thrown aside; and to divert her attention from saddening thoughts, she would talk for hours to Ada; but the pure girl's holy aspirations were beyond the ken of one who had made a heaven of baser and earthier materials.

She was sitting, one evening, with Ada beside her, when the child, after looking for some time in silence at the fire, suddenly said:

“Mamma, do you see any pictures in the fire?”

“Yes, darling,” answered the mother, with a little shiver, “dreadful, horrible pictures.”

“Horrible!” repeated Ada, with a look so dreamy and withal so quaint and old-fashioned, as to cause Mrs. Merton to start. “Now that’s queer,” she went on in a musing tone, and with an expression strange in one of her years; “I see

nothing but beautiful pictures. There now, I've been looking for five minutes at the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And it's so real, I can see the Heart just as plain! and the flames of His great love coming from it, and burning O, ever so brightly; and I was thinking, mamma, how happy that good Nun must have felt who used to see Our Lord's real Heart. Tell me, now, mamma, do you love the Sacred Heart?"

The miserable lady of fashion hardly knew what answer to make. She, who could with dexterity turn off the polished compliments of the most polished, who could converse with learned men on learned matters, was time and again, as at the present moment, abashed and perplexed by the innocence and simplicity of her daughter's radiant spirit.

"My love is not so great as yours, Ada."

"Well, mamma, I'm going to put my picture of the Sacred Heart in your room. And when you see it so often in the day, I'm sure you will come to love that Heart which has loved us so much." And, in pursuance of this design, Ada tripped out of the room, returning in a few moments with the picture from her dear shrine. Her mother, in the meantime, sat gazing gloomily at the coals, wondering where John was now passing the hours; fearing for the condition in which he should come home; imagining a thousand frightful accidents.

Poor woman! yours is no uncommon misery. Throughout the length and breadth of our fair land there are thousands of wives, who daily wait in fear for him whose returning step was once a song of joy to their hearts. Their husbands, once good and true, have taken to drinking. Little do they know, miserable men, what hidden tears, what agonizing watches, what pitiful prayers their recklessness entails; little do they know with what care the mother keeps her children aloof so as not to see the shame of him who should be their pride and proudest boast. God pardon you, Christian husbands, you who come home to a once happy family with muddled brains; who cause the boy to blush and the girl to weep for their father; and who make the tender hearts of God's noble women bleed with a bitterness all the more inconsolable, that they are powerless to stay the evil.

Ada, while placing the picture upon the mantelpiece, could not but notice the sadness of her mother.

"What is the matter, dear mamma? Don't you love me at all any more? You look so sad, and seem to be so sorry about something. Do I tire you, mamma?"

"You tire me, darling!" cried Mrs. Merton drawing the child to her, and embracing her as though fearful of losing her only treasure; "I love you more than everything in the world, and could not live without you. Indeed I am not

sad on your account. You are the one sure happiness that I can count upon. It is thinking of others that saddens me.”

“Well, mamma, just to keep you from thinking of sad things, I’ll sing you a song.”

“A song! Why, Ada, I didn’t know you could sing.”

“And I didn’t want you to know it,” cried Ada, clapping her hands with delight at the pleasant surprise she had created. “It is my first song, mamma, and I learned it just to please you.” And Ada seating herself at the piano, struck a few chords, and, with a voice so sweet and touching, that the poet whose words she used would have declared the singing quite in keeping with his own beautiful verses, sang the following stanzas:—

ST. AGNES’ EVE.

Deep on the convent-roof the snows
Are sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
May my soul follow soon!
The shadows of the convent-towers
Slant down the snowy sward,
Still creeping with the creeping hours
That lead me to my Lord;
Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snow-drop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soiled and dark,
To yonder shining ground;
As this pale taper’s earthly spark,
To yonder argent round;
So shows my soul before the Lamb,
My spirit before Thee;

So in my earthly house I am,
To that I hope to be,
Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far,
Thro’ all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, Thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean.

He lifts me to the golden doors;
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin,
The sabbaths of Eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide—
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with His bride.

—*Tennyson.*

Had there existed a little child in the golden days of primitive innocence, she would have sung in some such manner. There was something more than delightful music in the clear, sweet voice of the singer; there breathed through every note, as though it were its complement, the sacred love of a spotless heart, a heart burning to be united with the Spouse. As Ada ceased singing, the mother bent down and kissed her.

“Darling,” she said, while tears moistened her eyes, “your voice recalls the happy, happy time of long ago, the time when I was young and simple like yourself. But now I know so much more—and I’m sorry I know it. And yet what have I gained by my knowledge? Even now I would part with it all for but one sweet hour of old times.—But what nonsense I am talking,” and Mrs. Merton gave forth the dismal, dead echo of merriment—a forced laugh. “It is old feelings returning in spite of surer knowledge. Ada, when you were——”

A slight noise at the hall-door arrested her attention; and divining, with the quick instinct of a woman, who was entering and *how* he was entering, she turned crimson. “Ada,” she whispered, “steal quietly to bed: it is your father, who is annoyed about business matters, and he may be vexed at seeing you up so late.”

Something in her mother’s manner, rather than the words, caused Ada to depart without requesting the customary good-night kiss; and scarcely had she left the room, when Mr. Merton came up the stairs tramping heavily. The worst fears of his wife were realized. His eyes were inflamed; his face discolored; blood was on his shirt, and his clothes were torn, as though he had been engaged in a violent struggle.

Mrs. Merton could scarcely repress a cry of terror.

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” he said, in a tone intended to be reassuring, although in truth, it had a stern, hard ring, as if it came from a breast that enclosed a chaos of violent passions. “Don’t be afraid, I—I’m all right. But what’s *that*?” and as his eye caught the picture of the Sacred Heart, all the passions within seemed to awake for action.

“Ada’s picture of the Sacred Heart,” faltered Mrs. Merton.

With a dreadful oath, the man seized it, crushed it in his hands, threw it on the ground, spat on it, stamped on it; then burst into a paroxysm of invective against all that is sacred. And as he went from one blasphemy to another, an account of his long absence was supplied in snatches. He had lost fifteen thousand dollars that day; he had been basely swindled out of it by a smooth-tongued, oily-faced swindler. But he had settled the fellow with his good arms; swindlers would now know what it was to cheat a gentleman. He finished with another fearful outburst of profanity, while his horrified wife, checking not without effort an impulse to give way to tears, stood by in silence, asking herself was this the beginning of the end.

Meanwhile, Ada, happily unconscious of the dreadful scene, was praying for the drunken father and the weeping mother. Doubtless, glorious angels hovered about her. There was blasphemy in the next room; but in this world sanctity and sin are next door neighbors, though morally they are worlds apart.

CHAPTER VII

*The gladsome singing birds of spring,
The buds upon the tree,
The sunbeams gay and brightning,
No more bring joy to me.*

—Anon.

I will a round unvarnished tale deliver.
—Shakespeare.

IT was Palm Sunday, and the sun, seemingly impressed with the idea that Spring, who had long been at odds with Winter, had at length obtained her brief sceptre over the year, shone down bright and genial into the sitting-room of Mr. Merton's dwelling, lingering about the lady of the house, as if importuning her to awaken to all the newborn life and beauty of nature. But although the gay sunbeams danced their quickest measure in and out among the furniture, and upon the walls, where they seemed to play a lively game of peek-a-boo with the pictures; although an innocent little bird outside, yielding to appearances, carolled out loud and bold, defying, with bird-like gentleness, hoary winter with all his frost and snow; although five or six tiny buds on a bush in full view of the sitting-room nodded complacently in answer to the vernal breeze; although, in short, all things that spoke to the eye and ear were preaching the same joyous text to the lonely Mrs. Merton, her spirit was unconscious of them all. Her mind was agitated by a thousand fears. Truly, her sun of happiness seemed to be upon the downward slope. For the first time since the day of her marriage, Mr. Merton had left her side on Sunday, the day of rest. On rising in the morning he had shown signs of impatience, peevishness, almost of anger. More of his money, he said, was in jeopardy: and even on *that* day he must give all his attention to business.

It is a strange thing—and how often do facts show its truth—that men, when, after a long career of prosperity, they come to face serious, trouble, will almost invariably take to drink; unless, indeed, they are accustomed to lay all their burdens before the loving King of Sorrows, who had Himself become a man of sorrows for their sake.

Ada, too, was absent, attending High Mass at the Rock Church; and Mrs. Merton in her loneliness felt a twinge of jealousy against that God who could draw her child, even for an hour, from her bosom.

"In times long since gone," she thought, "my heart in its petty trials and

miseries could find a sweet, consoling refuge in prayer. But alas! where shall I now turn? Who shall sweeten my yoke, and lighten my burden? Ah, if there only were a living God beyond man! If there only were some great, glorious spirit who loved me, and had power to help me. But no; my husband, Ada—these are the loves in which my heart must ever endure. And yet, John is giving me so much anxiety. He who once was so devoted, so kind, so affectionate, so cheering, is now changing to a——” Her mind refused to dwell longer on the prospect, and with a sigh she resumed the reading of a novel that lay upon the table.

She was not a little surprised, when, of a sudden, Maggie stalked into the room, her round, red, good-natured face looking for the nonce very stern. Time was when Maggie could count upon being the sympathetic hearer and confidante of all Mrs. Merton’s troubles; but the last year had slowly, almost imperceptibly separated them by a wide barrier. As she entered the room, it was evident from her compressed lips, and from the general awkwardness of her movements that she had come upon some matter of importance. Mrs. Merton laid aside the book, and glanced inquiringly at Maggie, who, instead of announcing her errand, coughed, put one foot forward, then the other; finally, with a second cough, she wiped her face on her apron, and with a quick, jerky movement readjusted her whole position.

“Well, Maggie,” said Mrs. Merton with a smile of encouragement—how sad a smile to what it once was! “You seem to be in trouble.”

These words offered an outlet for the torrent of Maggie’s eloquence.

“Lord forgive you, Mary Merton; but I *am* in trouble, and all to your account. Mary Merton, I’ve been with you since you was a little girl—and a sweet, cheerful angel you was—being the pride and joy of your father and mother, who were such fools (may they rest in peace! amen) as to send you off to a gallivantin’ academy, where they taught you to use your feet much better than your catechism. I’ve been with you as a poor servant girl—and nobody dasen’t deny it,—and I have loved you to that, that I would do anything for you and yours. There was a time, too—tut! tut! tut!—when you would speak to me from your heart, as you once did w-he-when I was your darling n-n-nurse, and you used to cry on my bosom.” Maggie almost broke down at this point, but by a strong effort she forced back her feelings, and went on more severely than before. “There was a time, Mary Merton, when you went to the same dear, old church with myself, and partook of the same bread of life as myself—and now what are you?” Here Maggie folded her arms, and looked her mistress boldly in the face.

The miserable lady, at any other time, might have responded to this harangue with decision; now she was so dispirited that, burying her face in her

hands, she answered in a voice of entreaty rather than of command:—

“Maggie, Maggie, I am unhappy and wretched to-day. Leave me to myself; go, now, leave the room.”

“God forgive me Ma’am, if I’m saying wrong,” answered Maggie without changing her position in the least, “but leave this room I shall not, unless you take me by the neck, and shove me out—and I’d like to see anybody try that. Yes, Mary Merton, you may discharge me—Lord knows it would break my heart to be parted from you and Ada—but have my say out here and now I will, though it rains pitch-forks and cats and dogs all the time.”

Throughout this fugue of rhetoric there was apparent, like a harmonizing chord, deep, honest, homely love. The mistress, too dispirited for petty anger, and yet half pleased at the affection displayed, told Maggie to go on.

“Indeed, Ma’am, I will do that same, though the dead should raise. You are unhappy, Mrs. Merton, and you know it; and, what is more, you have given up our holy mother, the Church—”

“Who told you that?” cried Mrs. Merton, springing to her feet, her eyes glowing with excitement. Her apostasy she had held to be a secret between herself and her husband.

“Nobody told me, Mary Merton; but I know it, and have known that same for weeks.”

“Does Ada know it?” broke in the lady almost fiercely.

“Thank God, Mary Merton, her pure, suffering little heart has not that grief. But I tell you, Mary Merton,”—here Maggie took a step forward, and as she spoke, her voice grew in dignity and earnestness—“But I tell you, Mary Merton, you may scold me, you may discharge me, if you will; but I tell you, Mary Merton, that God will not wait long. The very holiness of your saintly child calls out to God against this wretched family; and the day will come, and not very far off too, for it takes no prophet to see that, when Ada will find out your unbelief. O Mary Merton! Mary Merton! come back before it is too late.”

Was this a warning from heaven? Were the passionate words of an unlettered servant-maid the voice of God? Often, indeed, the Creator makes use of the simple ones of this earth to confound the strong. But as these thoughts rose in Mrs. Merton’s mind, she quickly banished them as so many evidences of weak nerves; blinded by worldliness, her mind would allow no idea of a God beyond that of the God of pleasures. Maggie’s words had fallen upon stony ground, and in thorny places. The mental conflict lasted but for a few moments; and still Maggie, with an intuition strengthened by love, perceived that her words met with no response, and yielding to the warmth of her affectionate disappointment she began sobbing bitterly.

“Maggie, Maggie!” cried the lady, with a look of agony that Maggie never forgot, “don’t,—*don’t* cry before me; I have trouble enough already.”

“Y-y-you have, Ma’am,” answered Maggie in a burst of sobs, “and p-p-p-pray G-God you-you may not have more.” With this invocation the maid hastened from the room to give full vent to her grief in private, leaving the unhappy lady to shake off the painful feelings thus awakened by burying her thoughts in the intricate plot of the tale at hand. But even as she read, that one sentence seemed to ring in her ears like the voice of a troubled spirit;—“O Mary Merton, Mary Merton! come back, come back, before it is too late.”

CHAPTER VIII

*O thou invisible spirit of wine! if thou hast no name to be known by,
let us call thee devil!*

—*Shakespeare.*

SLOWLY did the hours of that dreary Palm Sunday pass away, bringing in their train nothing but bitter thoughts, and depressing qualms to the lonesome lady. At noon, Ada returned, and her presence in some degree dissipated the gloom; but the quarters even then moved slowly on for *one* foreboding heart, and when two o'clock, the appointed dinner hour, had come, the head of the family was still expected.

There are a thousand natural charms, which have a hallowing influence upon Sunday. On that day, home is more home, and life is more a thing of love, and less a matter of business: on that day, worldly cares are laid aside, and loved ones draw nearer one another, endeavoring to show by the genial smile and the fond word, that the money-buzz of traffic is stilled for the time being, and that the high and the holy chords of the heart respond to the same gentle influences as hallow the dawn of life. Mrs. Merton had known these charms for many years; but at last they all seemed to be rudely dispelled. Every footstep without, drew her to the window; but each time, she returned with deepened disappointment. Ada's eyes filled with tears of sympathy as she noticed her mother's growing depression.

"Come, mamma," she said, "you're getting so troubled: let us not think of papa; and just as soon as we forget all about expecting him, he'll be sure to come. Suppose I sing to you, mamma."

"Yes, Ada, sing about Agnes again."

As if to confirm her words, Ada had not fairly begun the tender monologue, when the hall door moved upon its hinges. Mrs. Merton's anxious ear caught the sound immediately, and, without interrupting Ada, she hastened to greet her husband. One glance sufficed to show her that he was irritated, that he had been drinking.

He was far from being drunk: the convenient, gentlemanly, varnishing title "tipsy" could, perhaps, be applied to him. As the wife's smile of greeting died away, the look of pain which superseded it was not unperceived by her husband. His faculties, though not in their normal condition, were not so dulled but that he could discern her suspicion. It galled him to think that his wife feared he was in no condition to be seen by Ada; and he resolved on the spot that, by force of will-power, he would not only refrain from doing or saying

anything foolish, but comport himself with such dignity and severity as would show to what an extent he had been misjudged.

“Well, Mary,” he said as he placed his hat on the rack, and took a furtive view of himself in the glass attached thereto, “is the dinner ready?”

“Yes, John: it has been long waiting for you. Come, let us go to the dining room.”

Just then Ada appeared, kissed her father, and the three proceeded to dinner. As Mrs. Merton entered the dining hall, she made Maggie a hasty sign to remove the claret from the table. But her husband, whose feelings of vexation had made him unusually vigilant, noticed the gesture; and as Maggie bore away the wine, his brow darkened, and he determined to show Mrs. Merton that he was not to be dealt with as a child. Therefore, appearing not to notice what had taken place, he seated himself at the table, and for some time kept silence. Then raising his eyes, he let them wander around, as if in search of something, till finally they rested on the face of his wife.

“Mary,” he said, “is there no wine in the house?”

“Yes, dear,” she faltered, “but you look so worn, John, and so jaded that I thought you might prefer a good cup of tea.”

“I want a bottle of claret.”

“Very good, John,” answered his wife in her most winning manner, “but you’ll wait till after dinner—to oblige me. And then I’ll take a little myself with you.”

“Maggie,” he said, totally ignoring his wife’s appeal, “bring the wine.”

On the bottle’s being brought, he filled and emptied a glass, and, seeing the visible annoyance of his wife, he deliberately drank down another. For some time after this there was a dead silence. At length Ada, wondering what could make her father so dull, took upon herself to start a subject.

“Papa,” she said with a smile that seemed to have grown in loveliness as had its owner in sanctity, “it’s only one week.”

“What’s only one week?”

“Before my first Communion, papa.”

The guileless child little knew the storm she was creating. Even in his soberest moments, Mr. Merton found it difficult to refrain from scoffing at her spiritual views; but now, in his half maudlin condition, he felt very clearly that it was his bounden duty to give Ada a few practical instructions in modern ethics.

“Only one week before your first Communion, eh?” and as Mr. Merton spoke these words in a husky tone, he laid down his knife and fork and, in

endeavoring to preserve a clear-headed appearance, cast a look of great severity upon his daughter.

“Yes, papa,” said Ada timidly, abashed by her father’s demeanor.

“Ada,” he continued in a solemn tone, “look me in the face.” The poor child in her turn laid down her knife and fork, and in some astonishment obeyed his injunction; while the miserable wife, who had vainly been making him signs to discontinue, now almost wished that the earth would open beneath her feet.

“What’s the matter, papa?” asked Ada, for the first time in her life affrighted by her father’s look.

“Matter!” he returned with a scowl worthy of Hepzibah Pyncheon; “do you see anything the matter with me?”

Ada was too astonished to reply.

“Now, Ada,” he continued, “I want you to listen to me. Haven’t I always given you lots of pretty things—dresses and money and—and what not?”

“Yes, papa.”

“And haven’t I always been a good, kind papa to you?”

“Indeed, you have, papa.”

“And yet, you are always hurting my feelings—your own papa’s feelings. You are always speaking of things I don’t like. Why down on Change men do everything to please your papa, because they know he is rich, and powerful and—and—”

“John!” interrupted his wife in a whisper full of piteous appeal.

“And honorable,” he continued without noticing the interruption. “*They* never say anything to hurt his feelings.”

“Why, papa, I hope you don’t think that I try to hurt your feelings. I wouldn’t do so for anything.”

“But you have. Why do you speak of first Communion to me? Can’t you talk about—eh—more refined things than that? In fact, I think, Mary, we had better take her away from that convent: she is being trained there to hate her father and mother.”

Ada’s eyes filled with tears at this imputation; Mrs. Merton fixed an imploring look upon her husband.

“John,” she said “this is Sunday. Let us leave all this till to-morrow.”

“I tell you, Mary,” answered the maudlin father, bringing his fist down so forcibly on the table that his wine glass was upset, “I tell you, Mary, there’s no time like the present. Ada, my child, to-morrow I will take you with me to find

some better school.”

The poor girl was now sobbing bitterly. Was this the father who heretofore had never spoken to her but with love and kindness? And her mamma was hurt too, for she was crying, silently indeed, but with no less bitterness for all that.

With an effort, Mrs. Merton suppressed her feelings, and, in a tone intended to divert her husband, again addressed him.

“Now, dear John, you know I will not consent to that. You must remember that I too am a Catholic, though not near so good a one as my darling, and I must insist upon Ada’s being educated in a Catholic school.”

“Mary,” he answered, “it’s no use deceiving Ada any longer. To us there is nothing higher, nothing more sacred than truth, plain and unvarnished. The cat *will* out of the bag; and I feel it my duty to tell A—”

“John, John,” almost shrieked his wife, “for the sake of all you love say no more—you are not yourself.”

“I will say more,” he answered doggedly; “Mary, out with the truth and tell the child that this twelve-month you have given up all belief in God, and that _____”

He never finished his words. A low, sad moan (such a moan as comes from the depths of blighting disappointment) froze his very soul, and as he started in horror from his seat, he saw Ada lying senseless in her mother’s arms.

Could Mr. Merton believe his eyes? The terrible fruits of his folly sobered him instantly; he rushed forward towards his fainting child; but the face of an angry woman stayed his progress. She was loosening Ada’s dress, while Maggie bathed her face. Mr. Merton standing mid-way in the room tore his hair.

“Oh, what have I done! what have I done!” he cried.

His words in his wife’s ears were as fuel to the flame. She gave Ada over to Maggie, and turning on him drew herself up like a queen passing sentence on a low traitor.

“What have you done!” she repeated with blazing eyes, “you have taken the notion of God from your wife; you have tried to take it from her daughter; and into the place that God once held in this house, you have introduced the demon of drink.”

Turning from him as though he were unworthy the look of bitter scorn which rested upon her countenance, she addressed herself to the child with all a tender mother’s love. “Speak to me, Ada; darling; darling child, speak to me.”

“Mrs. Merton, dear, be calm,” said Maggie, “Ada will be all right in a

moment. There, now, she opens her eyes.”

“Do you know me, darling?” cried the mother laying her cheek beside that of her child.

“Yes, mamma,” said Ada faintly.

The shame-faced father advancing caught her hand. “Ada,” he cried, “forgive me.”

But the child again relapsed; and as Mrs. Merton gazed upon her pallid face that one supplication returned to her mind, like the burden of a song;——

“Oh, Mary Merton, Mary Merton come back, come back, before it is too late.”

CHAPTER IX

*Lo as a dove when up she springs
To hear thro' Heaven a tale of woe,
Some dolorous message knit below
The wild pulsation of her wings;
Like her I go.*

Tennyson.

THE day that had brought so much sorrow to Ada was at its close. She was alone in her room thinking sadly of her parents' condition; and as she knelt at the foot of the cross her heart put itself into the words she breathed for father and mother; praying that they might come to the knowledge of the one, true God, "and of Jesus Christ, whom He had sent."

Ada was by no means of a despondent disposition. She was thrice happy; happy by nature, happy by grace, happy by innocence. But happiness is not opposed to zeal, and in one matter was concentrated all the earnestness of her soul; and that one matter was the honor of Jesus. She not only had faith, but it was a strong, earnest, wholesome faith; a faith that would endure wind and storm. Nor is it at all strange to find this virtue in one so young; for, to use the words of Cardinal Manning, "The mind of a little child is larger and more expanded for the conception of revealed truth, than the minds of philosophers and sceptics, who narrow their understandings with unreasonable and pertinacious doubt."

Ada, in her present depressed state, naturally thought of the many saints, who had been compelled to suffer so much for God; and as St. Agnes, St. Catharine, St. Cecilia, and those other heroic virgins of old suggested themselves to her mind her heart grew brave and she thanked her Saviour that she too was suffering something for His sake. And yet the bitter tears would crowd her eyes, to think that her mother was in danger of never seeing the good God.

"What can I do?" she thought; "what ought I to do?"

Her eyes wandered about the room, till their gaze was fixed upon the picture of the Blessed Virgin. And the loving face of that heavenly mother seemed so compassionate, so consoling, that she dwelt upon it for many moments. Suddenly her tearful face brightened. Why might she not write to her dear mother? St. Stanislaus had done so, and he was a great saint.

"Yes," she thought, "the Blessed Virgin is the Consoler of the Afflicted, the Mother of Sorrows; and I *know* that she loves me very much." The child was not long in deciding; then going to her desk, she wrote, in all the love and

confidence which only an innocent child can possess, the following letter:

Dear Mother Mary:

I am one of your little girls in St. Louis. I am just about ten, dear mother Mary, and I am trying as well as I can to be very good, and never offend your Son. I am in the first Communion class and I am so anxious to make a very good one. I am not at all afraid; for I know that our dear Saviour used to love children when He was on earth; and then He was so kind. And then He put His hands on them and caressed them, too; so I am not at all afraid.

I want to tell you in this letter, dear mother Mary, how much I love you. But I want to ask a present, too; at least I want you to ask your dear Son to grant me this present; for I know He will not say no to such a good mother as you. My heart is very sad to-night, dear mother Mary; I have often cried because that my father does not believe in God, and I have cried over and over again on that account. When papa said at dinner to-day that mamma did not believe in God, I felt such a sharp pain, and then I didn't know anything, till I woke up and was lying on my bed, and dear mamma, whom I love ever so much, crying over me, and asking me to speak to her. And when I looked at her, she seemed so glad, and came and kissed me over and over, as if she had not seen me for a long time. And then, dear mother Mary, when I asked her if she believed in God, she cried and only kissed me. Maggie was in the room, and she was crying too. Then mamma went out of the room, and in a few minutes came back with papa, who looked so sad, and told me I could go to the convent as long as I like, and he said he would get me the nicest white dress in the city for first Communion. I am glad of all that; but I love mamma so, and yet, dear mother Mary, she doesn't believe in you, nor in God, nor in the beautiful angels, that I often see in my dreams, and hear talk to me. O, won't you please pray for her? and for my father? Tell your dear Son that I love them ever so much and that I would die for them. I am only a little girl, and I am not of much use in this big world; and if I knew papa and mamma would become Catholics, I would be glad to die, and see your blessed face, and live with angels and saints.

So, dear Mother Mary, if you convert my parents, I will be so happy. And I am willing to die. I hope you will like what I say in this letter, and I hope you will not mind the mistakes of a little girl.

Your loving child,

ADA MERTON.

Carefully folding the letter, Ada placed it in her bosom, so that it might be with her night and day, until her petition was heard. She was about to resume her position at her *prie-dieu*, when Maggie's voice was heard outside;—

"May I come in, my darling?"

"Certainly, Maggie, I am glad you are come."

Maggie entered the room, and seeing at a glance that Ada had been weeping, she took the child in her lap and for some time stroked the little face in silence.

"Well, Maggie, I feel better now."

"Are you, alannah? Well, I'm glad to hear it this blessed night."

"Don't you think we can bring mamma back to believe in God, Maggie?" continued the child.

"Of course, we can," Maggie replied loudly and boldly; though she added under her breath, "It's a dreadful lie:—Why, Our Lord says that if two meet together in His name and agree on asking Him something, He will grant it; and now, Ada, you and me will pray for the Grand Mogul—your father, God forgive me that I should be losing my patience—and your mamma to get common sense, and to believe in God; and we'll be heard; and who'll say that we won't?"

"Very well, Maggie; and I'll get Sister Felicitas to pray with us, too."

"Do, honey. It's just the thing. That Sister is a jewel, she's so modest and gentle that I get bashful-like before her, which very seldom happens to me, seeing as I don't come of a bashful family, having two brothers as were the bravest in Ireland; God save her and keep her green forever!"

"Indeed, I know you are brave, Maggie," said Ada smiling.

"Well I'll not say no, though it isn't me as should say it," answered Maggie with a pleased air, "but if the Turk—if your father doesn't be improving, I'll talk to him like—like a Dutch uncle; and now, my dear, it is time for you to go to bed; but don't be down-hearted; never say die; there's as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Good-night." And with these first principles on her lips Maggie made her adieu.

Putting out the light, Ada again knelt beside the crucifix, praying in all earnestness for her parents. Long did the weak child hold her arms extended in the form of a cross; so long, that from sheer exhaustion they fell at her side. What a power is prayer coming from a pure heart; it constrains, as it were, the very will of the all-powerful God. And was Ada's supplication to be unheeded?

She heard not the opening of the door so absorbed was she in prayer; she saw not Mrs. Merton gazing on her in amazement. The mother advanced, unperceived, and caught the child to her bosom.

"Darling, why are you up so late? I thought you were in bed."

“I was praying for you, mamma,” was Ada’s simple answer.

“But you are too weak, my child, to stay up so late, and besides, little girls need more rest. Come, darling, let me help you to bed.”

Even after Ada had been snugly wrapped up, the mother hung over the slight form, her arms around the child’s neck.

“Ada,” she asked, with some hesitation and after a long pause, “do you still love me as much as before?”

“More, mamma, and I’ll never stop praying for you, till you believe in God.”

“That will never—” here Mrs. Merton checked herself, “I fear it will be a long time, but it may come. Now, my child, go to sleep.”

The mother with one arm still about her daughter, sang a cradle song which Ada well knew and soon the child was sleeping peacefully. But for hours afterwards Mrs. Merton gazed upon that pure lovely face.

Frequently would she kiss the pale cheek; and at times a look of pain (the outward expression of an indefinable presentiment) would cross her features. Did the fond, foolish, unhappy mother see the veil of futurity rent asunder? Did she discern even a shadow of wrath to come?

CHAPTER X

*Glory to God, who so the world hath framed,
That in all places children more abound
Than they by whom humanity is shamed.*

—Aubrey De Vere.

*He saddens; all the magic light
Dies off at once from bower and hall,
And all the place is dark, and all
The chambers emptied of delight.*

—Tennyson.

THE nearer the longed-for day of her first Communion approached, the more eager grew Ada's desire for the coming of her only Love.

The hallowing mantle of some saint appeared to have fallen upon her; and, as she threaded the streets on her way to school, many a hardened man would turn to look upon her pure face, and would feel instinctively a vague, newly awakened regret for the days, when his heart was less grovelling, less of the earth, and knew something of that peace which the proud, rich world has never given.

The dark shadow of infidelity which came between her father and mother did not utterly take away her joy; true, her earthly love lay bleeding; but she was one of those "thrice-blessed, whose loves in higher loves endure." And she felt so confident too that her Divine Visitor would surely grant her parents' conversion.

None of her school-mates, when they saw the tastily-dressed, smiling, gentle girl, reckoned for a moment that she bore within her bosom a weight of care, which few Catholic children—thank God—ever have to experience.

It was the last Thursday that preceded the great morning. Ada was standing in the school-ground among a knot of little girls.

"Only three days more!" said one. "My! Doesn't it seem awful strange?"

"Strange!" cried another; "I am so anxious for the day to come; and mamma has made me—O! just the *love-li-est* white dress!" The little miss invested her whole stock of vigor in that one adjective.

"I'm going to have something more nicer than that," broke in the smallest of the group. "My ma is going to get me the sweetest crown of roses for my head. What are you going to have, Ada?"

"Papa and mamma are getting me a very nice dress," Ada answered.

"And your mamma prays for you all the time? and says the beads with you

every night, doesn't she?" pursued the interrogator.

No one that looked on Ada's tranquil countenance could have had the faintest suspicion of the heart-sickness she felt at these questions.

"Does your mother pray for you?" she asked, thus turning off the question.

"Does she!" answered the other, "why that's just *no name for it*, as my brother Tom says—brother Tom does use such horrid slang—she seems so anxious for me to be a good girl, and make a very good Communion. And then she tells the sweetest stories about first Communion, they'd make you cry to hear them." The child had scarcely entered fairly upon her narration, when all the little girls began speaking simultaneously, except Ada, who being the only listener became at once the victim of six different accounts, interesting, no doubt, of "mamma's" great interest in the great day. Their babble created a sense of void in poor Ada's heart; much as she loved her mother, she could never receive that sympathy which only a devout mother can give.

When the bell rang for the ending of recess, all the children hurried away in a great flutter to the room where they were being prepared. It was the day appointed for distributing the prizes to those in the Communion class who had been distinguished for exemplary conduct. No one doubted who was to be the winner of the first prize; and when Ada Merton was read out for it, fifty little hands and as many joyous eyes were unanimous in testifying their owners' approbation. Ada's countenance flushed with pleasure, as with a smile and a bow she received from the hands of Sister Felicitas a beautifully bound volume. She knew that her mother was always proud when her little girl excelled in anything—even in religion.

As Bob met her at the school door in the afternoon, he noted her pleased expression.

"Well, missy Ada," he began, "you does look happy dis afternoon; what is you glad about?"

Ada told him of her prize, showing the book.

"You'se a great book bible-maniac," here Bob coughed to hide his conscious triumph. "Bible-maniac" was the proudest word graven on the tablets of his memory, and it was seldom he had an opportunity of astonishing his auditors by its ponderous sound. "Yes, missy Ada," he repeated, "you'se a great book bible-maniac."

"What is a book bible-maniac, Bob?" asked his amused charge.

"The tahm book bible-maniac," answered Bob with dignity, "am a Greek suppression, and means some one what's gone on books. But," he continued laying aside his dignity, and beaming with smiles, "I'se happy too, missy Ada, dis hyar day."

"I thought something nice had happened to you. Has papa raised your wages?"

"Lor' bress you, missy, I doesn't caeh fo' wages. 'De wages ob sin am deff.' " Bob stopped to chuckle over the apt quotation, and added, "Missy, I'se jes' done had a glorious time."

"Why what have you been doing? Are you ready soon to be baptized?"

"You'se red hot, missy; almos' guessed it. I'se done made my fust 'fession."

"Did you!" cried Ada with brightening eyes; "I'm so very, very glad. And don't you feel happy?"

"As, as a big sun flowah," was the genial reply.

"That's good; and when you are baptized you will be fit to go straight to heaven, if you were to die."

"I 'spose I would. I nebbeh yet felt so light an' gay; an' I made de pries' laugh, too."

"You did! How was that, Bob?"

"You see, he says to me when he opened dem chinks in de 'fession box, 'My chile, how long since you last 'fession?' an' he didn't look at me at all. So as I didn't want decebe him, I says 'ef you look through these heah chinks, father, you'll see dat I'se no chile; I'se neah forty-five yeahs ole, an I'se nebbeh been to 'fession befoah. I'se a new controvert, *I* is,' an den he smile, an' tole me a lot o' nice sayins, an' I tole him all about mysef, an' nex' Sunday when you makes youah fust Communion, I'se to be baptized."

"It will be a very happy day for both of us," said Ada in high delight at Bob's good sentiments. "But here we are home already, and there is mamma waiting for me on the steps."

Mrs. Merton's face relaxed from the expression of sadness that of late had been becoming habitual to it, as Ada showed her the prize.

"So it's for virtue, Ada," she said, as they proceeded towards the sitting-room. "Well, I think you deserve it. You remind me of those child-saints I used to read of, when I was a girl like yourself."

"Ah, mamma," said Ada sadly, "you never read such books now."

"No, my child; I have no time for such trifles."

"Trifles!" cried the child, her face glowing with earnestness, "how can you say that? O mamma, mamma, dearest! Every morning when I look from the window, at the sun, and smell the sweet flowers, in my garden, and hear the little birds singing so, I can't help *feeling* that there's a good, great God, who

made all these pretty things for us, mamma.”

“And so you count me out, do you?” chimed in Mr. Merton, who had just entered the room unperceived; “why Ada, you’re an out and out little poet—only you have all the beauty of the present style of poets, without their eternal leaven of mysticism and nonsense. I think,” he added taking pencil and paper from his coat, “I’ll make a note of what you said, and send it on to the Century Magazine. The editors would like it I’m sure.”

“O don’t papa: but I know you’re only joking.”

“Am I though?” said the imperturbable father, “we’ll see. How was that you said it?—Ah, yes (here he began writing): ‘Every morning when I look out of my window—’ ”

“O papa, *please* don’t,” begged Ada with so much earnestness that the impromptu reporter threw aside his tablets, and indulged with his wife in a hearty laugh.

The room seemed to brighten for the moment (it had long been dull enough), and Mr. Merton began to talk in his former happy, jocosé manner. Ada was overjoyed at the change; and Mrs. Merton actually lost all her gloom. But a calm often precedes the storm. While the moments were still gliding merrily along, the bell was heard ringing, and presently Maggie entered the room with a telegram, which she handed her master. He tore open the envelope nervously and read its contents with gathering brows. Tearing it to pieces, and muttering a suppressed oath, he strode from the room. The astonished lady gathered up the fragments of the telegram, and, while throwing them in the fire, saw, without intending it, on one of the scraps, “*Bender’s Bank fa—*.” She could readily surmise his trouble; for if the Bender’s Bank had closed its doors, he would be a loser of more than one-half of his fortune.

It was eleven o’clock before he returned that night, and his bloodshot eyes and flushed face told their story.

CHAPTER XI

*Then out came his lady fair,
A tear into her ee;
Says "stay at home, my own good lord,
O stay at home with me!"*

—*Old Ballad.*

THERE was great excitement in the city the next morning. Men who had retired the previous night in fancied security awoke to find themselves ruined. The Bender's Bank had always enjoyed high favor with the poorer classes; and the industrious servant girl, who had been happy in a growing bank account, the clerk who had deprived himself of countless luxuries with a view to beginning business for himself, and the simple laboring man who had laid by something for a rainy day, were at once reduced to the lowly state whence they had begun. It was a pitiful sight to see the crowd thronging the narrow street facing the bank; pale, angry creditors beating at the closed doors, some shouting madly, others proclaiming their losses to entire strangers; others too miserable to speak: more pitiful still to note among them poor, pinched working girls, many of them weeping bitterly. Mr. Merton was a heavy loser; nearly all his cash was on deposit there; and were it not for the large amount he had invested in real estate, he would have been utterly ruined. Looking to nothing beyond this world, money was to him of supreme importance; and the loss drove him almost frantic. The first pallor of dawn had scarcely thrown its dim, gray veil over the city, when he started from his bed, as though awakening from a troubled dream.

"Mary," he said, turning upon her his wild swollen eyes, "where is the paper?"

She procured it for him; and he eagerly ran his eyes over the columns, moaning, and muttering to himself in a manner that made his wife tremble.

"John," she faltered, "don't make yourself so miserable: remember, my dear, that you have your wife and daughter, whom all the banks in the world couldn't take from you. Beside you have your real estate to fall back upon. We are far, very far from being poor."

But Merton heeded not her remarks, so absorbed was he in the account of the bank's liabilities. Suddenly, he started up in bed, clenched his hands, threw them wildly about, and uttered a blood-curdling imprecation on the heads of those who had in charge the business management.

"Look at that," he shouted, when the tempest of his wrath had moderated; and he pointed to a certain paragraph.

She read:—"The affairs of the bank have been so poorly, so recklessly managed, that it seems doubtful whether its creditors will ever be able to make good two per cent. of their money. It is rumored that the cashier, who is in large part responsible, will 'lie shady' for some time to come."

In the meantime, Mr. Merton was dressing; but so wild were his actions that his wife trembled with alarm.

"Where are you going so early, my dear?" she inquired in her most winning manner. "Surely you do not intend leaving us so long before business hours."

He made no answer, but hastened to complete his toilet. Still silent, he went to the bureau; pulled out one drawer after another, throwing drawer and contents on the floor, in search evidently of some particular article.

His wife stood by in trepidation: never before had she seen him in so furious a mood.

"Mary," he broke out suddenly, "where are my pistols?"

"O John, my love," she moaned while clasping her hands together, "what are you about to do? There is murder in your eye, dear John. No, no; you mustn't ask for them; you shall not have them."

"Very well, then: this will do," and he advanced towards the mantelpiece, whereon lay a richly-hilted dagger.

But his wife was before him, and hid it in the bosom of her dress. "No, dear John," she said turning to her baffled husband, who, furious as he was, still respected his wife, "you are carried away by passion, and may do in a moment what may occasion life-long regret."

"Let me see the dagger," he persisted.

"Not now, dearest: you shall see it some other time."

The words, "you shall see it some other time," were uttered at random. But later on he *did* see it, and the wildness of her features now was as nothing in comparison to the dreadful memories that were to cluster about that other time, when in an agony she made good the unwitting promise she had given, little knowing, poor woman, of its dreadful fulfillment.

"Well, Mary, I must go," and he made to leave the room.

But she threw her arms around him, and begged with tears to know what he was about. He softened a little, and a film came over his eyes.

"Mary, my life, it is all my love for you and for Ada. I have been swindled: basely, outrageously swindled. The money that was to afford you and—and my only child all the pleasures of life, has been taken by a set of rascals. Yesterday at three o'clock, just before the bank closed I deposited in addition

to what I had already there, eight thousand five hundred dollars, the proceeds of a sale of land, I had made that day; and the black-hearted scoundrel of a cashier, who knew that the bank was to close forever three minutes later—the—dastard”—here he ground his teeth, and for a moment failed of words, so great was his wrath—“this cashier smiled pleasantly, took my money and invited me with his glib tongue *to call again!* I tell you, Mary, before this day is out, I’ll have his blood!”

But she held him fast, and hung sobbing on his bosom.

“No John, promise me not to seek for him—to-day at least. Wait till to-morrow.”

“But I will seek him to-day, Mary; and either he or I will close our accounts for good.”

He struggled to get away, but his wife clung to him, speechless and sobbing. For a moment he stood infuriated, still with enough of the human in him not to offer the least violence to the woman of his love. But as his wrongs chased through his memory all gentle feelings began to leave him. He caught his wife with his strong arms, and held her as though about to throw her from him. While they were thus standing, Ada entered the room. The horrible anger on her father’s face filled her with terror; the miserable, frightened countenance of her sobbing mother inspired her with pitying love. She drew back for a moment in amazement, not knowing what course to take; then raising her loving eyes in supplication, she said:—

“Kiss me, dear papa.”

And the strong, furious man raised his little daughter in his arms, embraced her, and burst into tears. The innocence and love of Ada had conquered him for the time.

Before he departed for town that morning, he promised his wife on his honor that nothing should tempt him to make search after the swindler.

How long and dreary was that day to Mrs. Merton. There was a time—quite recently, indeed—when her husband’s word was to her a motive of supreme confidence. But now, should he drown his sorrows with wine, what reliance could be placed on his most sacred promises? Evening came, and with it a terrific storm. The sky had been gloomy throughout the day; from early morning, the clouds, like a hostile army, had been massing themselves together in the heavens. Clad in their blackest, they lowered upon the world, and seemed preparing to make a descent upon it, as upon their most hated enemy. Towards noon, low mutterings of thunder had been heard, which grew in distinctness as the day declined. About four of the afternoon, the wind which had been sobbing and sighing all day, arose violently, and gave forth the

whistling battle-cry of the storm king; down came the rain, fiercely and pitilessly; streak after streak of lightning cast a mocking, momentary flash of light over the unnatural darkness: and the thunder almost unintermittently rattled and crashed along the heavens.

Ada was safe at home; Mr. Merton had not yet returned. His wife stood at the window with the child, and the dark, lowering, massed clouds seemed to sink into her very soul; the heavy peals of thunder reached her foreboding heart like the moan of calamity; and the forked lightning shone before her like gleams of hatred from hostile eyes.

“Why do you shiver, mamma? are you afraid?” asked Ada noticing her mother’s affright.

“I am very nervous, darling; I feel as though the dark shadow of death were hovering above our house.”

“Death isn’t a dark shadow; for after it we shall see the glorious God and His saints.”

“If it were only so,” sighed the poor woman. “But why is your father so late? and in such weather, too. I have been expecting him this hour.”

At that moment a terrific clap of thunder broke upon the air. Mrs. Merton had become so nervous, that at the sound she sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. She was called to herself by Ada’s voice.

“O look, mamma, we’re going to have visitors.”

Mrs. Merton arose, and looking out of the window, saw a carriage in front of the house. Fearing that the unknown evil was near, she rushed from the room, and down the stairs, where she was met at the door by a gentleman.

“My husband! where is he?” she gasped, for her voice was choked by agitation.

“Be calm, madam, he is not seriously injured: he is only stunned.”

With a low, sad cry of pain, she hastened past him to the street. Already four men were lifting his helpless form out of the carriage. He was senseless, and there was a wound on his head, from which the blood had issued and clotted upon his hair. It was a gloomy sight, the carriage black and bespattered with mud; the driver on the seat so wrapped that he looked like the shadow of death; the pelting rain falling upon the helpless body and its bearers, and the wild but beautiful lady catching the irresponsible hand of her husband. But, they hastened to tell her, he was not seriously injured. A good night’s rest they assured her, would enable him to be about on the morrow.

The wretched man, as we have seen, had left the house early in the morning, and faithful to his promise had at first taken no measures to meet

with the cashier. All would have gone well, had he restrained himself from liquor. But in his rage he had imbibed freely; and in a state bordering on frenzy, chance had brought him face to face with the cashier. Words were exchanged; blows followed. So furious was the attack of the liquor-crazed man, that his opponent, through fear of losing his life, seized a cane and struck Merton a severe blow upon the head.

The wound was not at all serious, but the tipping! This it was that weighed most heavily upon Mary Merton's heart. She began to realize that one source of her happiness was gone; that the formerly kind, and sober husband could be no longer depended on with the same, confiding, loving reliance. She sat beside her husband's bed, long after he had fallen into a heavy slumber; and her thoughts were bitter. She looked upon the pain-contracted face of Mr. Merton, and shuddered, as her consciousness told her that the old love was ebbing away surely but slowly, and rounding into the narrower forms of fear and anxiety.

Ada had long been slumbering quietly, when she was awakened by her mother's warm kisses.

"O Ada, my child," cried the mother, clasping the little girl tightly to her bosom, "you, my darling, and only you, are my happiness, my heaven, my all."

CHAPTER XII

*I've been abased, insulted, and betrayed;
My injured honor cries aloud for vengeance
Her wounds will never close!*

—*Shakespeare.*

THE next day brought back the sun bright as ever; it reawakened the stilled voices of the birds, and the light touch of the vernal breeze; it restored peace, calm and joy, to all nature—and consciousness, though not peace, to the injured man. His heart was envenomed with hatred, and his mind revolved a thousand projects for meting out punishment to his enemy adequate to the insult. But no word escaped his lips indicative of the thoughts of vengeance he was nursing. He spoke but little, and every answer that he tendered his wife's anxious inquiries fell upon her ear like the harsh sounds of some shattered musical instrument.

His proud spirit chafed at the treatment he had received. And why should he pass over an insult, why should he turn the other cheek, since long years ago he had rejected the Prince of Peace, since he had sneered at the sublime commands of Him who tells us to "love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute and calumniate us?" But bound to his bed by the cruel bonds of pain, he was powerless for the day: and at times he would gnash his teeth and groan, not for physical suffering, but for his impotency to wreak instant vengeance upon his cowardly assailant.

At length he determined upon his course of action. Dismissing his wife from the room on some shallow pretext, he hastily penned the following note to the cashier:

"SIR,

If you are a gentleman (which I have many reasons for doubting) you will meet me at two o'clock P. M. to-morrow (Sunday) in Barker's saloon west of the Fair Grounds. Bring any friend of yours along that you please. I will await you there till night, and if you fail to appear (as seems to be very probable) I will brand you as a coward, and horsewhip you on the first occasion.

JOHN MERTON."

Secretly summoning Bob, he despatched him with the missive to the cashier's residence. When Mrs. Merton returned, she felt instinctively that her husband was cherishing some new secret; but so dispirited was the humbled lady, that she dared not question him. Mr. Merton, now that he had relieved his mind on the one subject which was rankling there, suddenly became lively and gay; and to his wife's no little joy spoke cheerfully of his losses, and with

consummate art, diverted all the suspicions which she previously might have formed.

It was an utterly different day to Ada; for it was the one of her final preparation for the happiest event of her life. Long after her confession, she remained before the tabernacle, praying for those of her own household, who were sitting in the shadow of death; praying that the good God might open their eyes to the brightness of eternal light; praying that in union with her they might come to recognize one God, one Faith, one Lord and Master of all. She returned home filled with beautiful thoughts of the next morning.

“Papa,” she said, “are you better this evening?”

“Why, of course. Can’t you see I’m better? I expect to go out in the yard to-morrow, and stand on my head to show you how hard it is.”

“Well, papa,” here Ada hesitated, “won’t—won’t you come along with mamma to-morrow morning, and see me make my first Communion?”

He turned uneasily in his bed.

“All the other little girls are going to have their papas, and mammas along,” Ada suggested.

“That’s a pretty strong argument,” answered the father, “but it’s so chilly in the morning. That hole in my head has created quite a draught up there.”

“Do come, John,” urged his wife, seeing that he was inclining to assent.

“Well, I’ll go; seeing that the whole family is standing out against me. But you needn’t ask me to come to church again, till I build one myself.”

Ada clapped her hands, and, bending down, kissed him tenderly.

“That’s a good, dear papa,” she said, “and I’m going to pray so hard for you and mamma to-morrow morning, that I’m sure our Saviour will hear me.”

Mr. Merton smiled incredulously.

“I’ve heard of ‘care killing a cat,’ ” he said, “but no one ever heard of prayer even making one blink, so you may pray away Ada: it will do neither you nor us any harm.”

“But it will do you good: won’t it mamma?”

“I’m afraid not, Ada, your papa and I are too old to change our opinions so easily; even to please the darling little daughter we love so much.”

“Too old!” answered Ada with an artlessness which transcended the highest art; “why you’re not old, mamma. Sister Felicitas told me once, the day after she met you and me walking together, that you look so young, and more like my elder sister than my mother.”

“Did she?” said Mrs. Merton, not a little pleased. From that moment she

felt a friendly regard for Ada's teacher.

"Yes, mamma, and she wants to know you, and is always asking me why you don't come and pay her a visit."

"Well, well, I must go and see Sister Felicitas soon: she must be very nice, since my little girl can love her so much."

"O, indeed, she is very nice: and I'm sure you'll love her very much; and she'll be able to tell you ever so many things about God, that will make you believe."

Ada was now happy: she felt that a victory had been gained; that her parents were coming closer to the true faith. Resolving to push her advantages, she added, after a pause:—

"Sister Felicitas said something beautiful to us to-day."

"What was it, Ada?" asked Mrs. Merton.

"She told us that our loving Jesus enters our souls in holy Communion as into a tabernacle; and that He loves to find this tabernacle adorned with the flowers of virtue. And then she said that the flowers dearest to Jesus were the roses of love, the lilies of purity and the violets of modesty; and that as the dew brings out more perfectly the loveliness of an earthly flower, so the dew of prayer makes these heavenly flowers most grateful to His loving Heart. And so now, dear mamma, and papa, I'm going to my room for a while to pray for this heavenly dew. Good-bye, dear mamma, good-bye, dear papa," and she kissed them with a loving tenderness all the greater that it seemed to be spiritualized into the highest and holiest love which poor human nature can attain.

"Ah, John," sighed the mother when Ada had left the room, "I felt just then as though, in spite of all my experience and knowledge, I was in the presence of some superior being."

"Hum," muttered John trying to resist the same conviction, "natural sensation—animal magnetism, electricity, et cetera. But," he continued with more earnestness, "she really is a wonderful child. There are preachers abounding, who could never attempt to speak in the beautiful simple way, in which she just now spoke to us. Her subject was nonsensical of course; but one could see that she really believed what she said, which is much more than can be allowed of our high salaried ministers of the day. Yes, Mary; we must take good care of her. In a few years, she will be as beautiful a young lady as this country can boast—if she live."

"Live!" echoed his wife, "my goodness, John, you can't imagine that she will be taken from us!"

"I don't know, Mary; but when she kissed me just now with that strange

spirituelle look shining about her, I felt as if she were going away for a long time.—But that's nonsense—superstition.”

“Of course,” she assented, “if a person is a little careful, death need never be considered. It is a morbid thought. Life becomes intolerable under its shadow. But, John, let us love Ada more and more, for, to adapt the beautiful comparison of Sister Felicitas, she is, indeed a rose of love.”

“Yes; but we had better tend our blossoming little flower very carefully, lest those ogres of the black veil, of which Sister Felicitas is a member, steal our rose away and leave us nothing but the thorns.”

“Have no fear, John: Ada may persist in her religion—for though it be false, I really am coming to think that it is a blessing to those who believe—but, mind me, she shall never be a nun.”

CHAPTER XIII

*The priest comes down to the railing,
Where brows are bowed in prayer;
In the tender clasp of his fingers
A Host lies pure and fair,
And the hearts of Christ and the Christian
Meet there—and only there.*

—Abram J. Ryan.

THE happy morning was come. Long before the ruby-tinted messengers of the sun had set his royal signet in the East, Ada was up and dressed. Never did she look more like a bright stranger from the unknown land than at the dawn of this Easter morning, as robed in spotless white she knelt before her crucifix, her very eyes, nay her whole being, the “homes of silent prayer.” Shining with “the light that never yet was seen on land or sea,” her face seemed to reflect the happiness of the blessed. A graceful and fragrant chaplet of roses, lilies and violets (suggested to her mother by the conversation of the preceding afternoon), rested like a glory on her fair hair; and, to borrow from a great author, “she looked like a creature fresh from the hands of God.”

Not a word did she utter on her way to church; and her parents respecting, if not appreciating, her feelings, allowed her to walk before them.

“John,” whispered Mrs. Merton, as they neared the vestibule of the church, “look at the beauty of our child. Isn’t it something unearthly?”

“It is remarkable,” he conceded; “never saw anything like it. If there were anything in our reach that wasn’t part and parcel of the earth, I would assent to your qualifying epithet.”

And now for the first time in sixteen years, Mr. Merton, accompanied by his wife who was fast becoming a stranger too, found himself seated in a Catholic church, and looking again upon the great sacrifice of the Mass. But their carnal eyes had no sympathy for the grand mystery presented to them: Ada, and Ada alone absorbed their attention.

As the child was returning from the communion table, Mrs. Merton could hardly believe her eyes.

“John, John, look at her face,” she whispered. “Do my eyes deceive me, or isn’t her countenance aglow with light?”

“Bosh!” answered the husband, “she does look like the angels they talk of, but don’t you know what tender sensibilities, and what a lively imagination Ada has? She thinks she’s united to an impossible First Cause—that’s all. Why

if that man at the altar were a bogus priest, and the bread she just now received hadn't been consecrated or whatever you call it, she would have looked just the same."

It was a strange thing; and yet as Ada had turned from the railing, Mr. Merton had by a sort of instinct thrown himself upon his knees; but on remembering himself, had slipped into his seat, as though ashamed of himself. Mrs. Merton did not kneel for a moment.

On the way home the husband was in bad humor; and he went so far as to aver that he would never enter a Catholic church again—he would die first. And yet the unhappy man knew in the depths of his heart that his spleen arose from the gnawings of conscience, that his bitterness was caused by the memory of his own happy first communion.

Mrs. Merton, too, was sad; for she could not but confess to herself, that notwithstanding her denial of the existence of God, she might have been much happier, she should now be much more hopeful, if her faith, baseless though it were, had never been shaken.

So, when they reached their dwelling, they were in no mood for conversation; and they awaited Ada, each one busied with thoughts, better, perhaps, for each other's sakes, left unsaid. And when the child arrived, it was like the sunbeam penetrating the gloomy cell of a prison. She gaily told them all about herself and her fellow-communicants; how happy each was, and what beautiful pictures the kind Sister had given them.

"Look at mine!" she went on taking a number of pictures from her prayer-book. "Some of them are the prettiest I have ever seen. Here's Blessed Margaret Mary, and there's St. Agnes; but look at this one—all in bright colors—it's the dear child Jesus in a manger. Now, mamma, you must kiss it."

Ada bent an eager pair of eyes upon her mother, who with a crimson face kissed the picture.

"You must do the same, papa," continued Ada presenting it to her father.

"Why, how well that white dress becomes you," said Mr. Merton evading the point as usual. "You look like a miniature Venus rising out of the sea-foam: never did I see you looking so pleasing."

"I'm glad you like it, papa; but why don't you kiss the picture?"

"Well, it is a lovely dress, in an aesthetic point of view. Dear me, the sweetness and light are all there. You ought to live in such a dress as that always."

"I'd like to die in it, papa."

"Ada, my darling," broke in the mother, her voice quivering as she spoke,

“don’t think of death. Never use that word. You so young, so lovely, so innocent, so talented; with all the gay pleasures of life before you! No, no darling, such subjects do not become you.”

“There’s not a girl in our class, mamma,” answered Ada with heightening color, “who would not gladly die to-day. This morning I begged my dear Saviour to take my life, if that would bring you and papa to the true faith.”

“I’m glad you love us so much as that,” said Mr. Merton; “but”—and he smiled scornfully—“so long as you offer your life to God only, there’s not any extraordinary danger of your being heard. However Ada, I want you to be more careful of your health, you are beginning to grow pale and thin. By the way, Ada, don’t you fast?”

He fixed his sharp eyes upon her. She hung her head, blushed, but made no answer.

“Answer me,” he commanded, with his eyes still upon her. “You are very pale, Ada. Didn’t you fast yesterday?”

“Yes, papa; but it was for you and mamma. Nobody except God knew of it, till now.”

Upon this admission, Mr. Merton plied question after question; and though his face grew very grave, and his wife was moved to tears, when they learned some of the austerities which Ada had been imposing on herself for their sakes, they failed to discover one tithe of the bodily sufferings that Ada had voluntarily undergone for their sins. Ever since the day that her mother’s unbelief had come to light, Ada not sufficiently versed in asceticism to consult her confessor in such matters, had embraced austerities above her strength.

Even over what they learned, her father and mother were very serious; and at breakfast they watched her closely. But Ada had already perceived her mistake.

“You needn’t watch me, papa; up to this, I didn’t know any better,” she said. “After this I will never fast or do anything of that sort without letting you know it.”

“Had I been a fervent Catholic,” thought the mother, “she would not have done such things without consulting me. Poor child! I fear that I am not all to her that a perfect mother should be.”

A little after mid-day, Mr. Merton, who had been growing moodier as the time drew near to the hour appointed for meeting the cashier, called for his coat and cane.

“What! going out to-day, John?” cried his wife, a feeling of vague uneasiness creeping over her.

“Yes, Mary,” with as much lightness as he could assume, “I have a—eh—eh—a business engagement to attend to.”

With a heavy heart, she accompanied him to the hall door. She longed to give him *one* caution; but she feared his anger. Oh, if she could but muster up courage for those few words! She looked up to his face wistfully, as he turned to go; and her hopes rose as she noticed how pleasantly he smiled on her. He remarked her wistful look, and paused on the threshold.

“Well, Mary, what is it you wish to say?”

“John, dear, don’t,—O, do not drink anything.”

She never forgot the look of fury that transformed his countenance: without answering a word, he turned on his heel; but she caught his arm and clung to it.

“Don’t leave me in this fashion, John,” she cried pleadingly. The proud man with an effort restrained himself, and in that moment of hesitation, it flashed through his mind that possibly he might never return to his family.

“You are right, Mary,” he answered, “we have never yet parted in anger, nor shall we to-day. Where is Ada?”

Ada was just descending the stairs.

“Why, papa, to-day is Sunday; and Easter Sunday too,” she said. “You mustn’t leave us to-day.”

“But I must, though, so good-bye, Ada,” and to the astonishment of his wife, he raised the child in his arms, and embracing her with unusual tenderness, held her to his breast for several minutes.

“Perhaps,” he was thinking, “I shall never see her again.” Then with a gesture of adieu, he closed the door, and with it he closed out all love and peace; for his mind now turned to thoughts of revenge. With a darkening brow, he made his way to the Fair Grounds, but the thought, “perhaps, I shall never see her again,” rang in his heart like a prophetic dirge. Once he was prompted to turn back; but he crushed the impulse and went on.

CHAPTER XIV

*Like one, that on a lonesome road,
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.*

—Coleridge.

TWO o'clock of that eventful Sunday afternoon arrived; but there was one opponent only at the designated meeting place. An hour passed, then another, and still no new arrival. Mr. Merton grew impatient, and strode up and down a path beside a shady grove, furious at the delay.

At length despairing of a meeting, he repaired, to relieve the monotony, to the wayside inn, and ordering a bottle of wine, seated himself at a table. Standing at the counter, were a few well-to-do looking men engaged, if one could judge by their looks, in an exciting conversation. At the entrance of the new-comer, they paused for a moment in their talk, but after surveying him, continued the interesting theme. At first, Mr. Merton was so buried in his own thoughts, that their words fell idly upon his ear. Suddenly his face changed, and he was all attention.

"They say he's hidden at Florissant," said one. These were the words that brought Mr. Merton into a listening attitude.

"That's strange," chimed in another; "for he told me the very day after the break, that he'd stay and face the music."

"Yes," answered the first speaker, "but it appears that some one sent him a threatening message yesterday—blood, knives, pistols, and that sort of thing—and being uncommonly weak in the nerves, he's run away."

Merton concluded that they were speaking of the cashier, and so great was his excitement while listening that he unconsciously drained glass after glass. The speakers were branching off to some other subject, when he arose, walked up to them, and fixing eyes, that bespoke intense passion, upon one of the informants gasped out:—

"Sir, pardon me; did you allude to the cashier of the Bender's Bank?"

"The same, sir," answered the man after a moment's pause.

Without noticing the significant glances which the men exchanged, Merton abruptly left the tavern. There was no going back now. He must set out for Florissant, immediately; but it would not do to return home for his things; for

his wife was already sufficiently alarmed. Walking rapidly to Easton Avenue, he took a street car, stepping off at the first livery stable it passed.

“A horse and buggy, till to-morrow morning—the fastest horse you’ve got,” he said handing his card to the hostler, who upon reading it, touched his hat respectfully and hustled off to execute the commission.

After a delay which seemed interminable, the hostler delivered the reins into his hands. Springing into the buggy impatiently, Merton gave the horse a sharp cut, and started at break-neck speed.

The astonished hostler strained his eyes after the fast receding vehicle, scratched his head, shook it, and then remarked:—

“Well, if that ‘ere hoss comes back right side up, I’m another, *I* am. But Mr. Merton’s able to foot the damages—that’s one consolation.”

Long before he had concluded his soliloquy, the object of it was out of sight. On he drove spinning over the road till city houses were succeeded by suburban residences, and glimpses of woods flashed before him; on he drove till cottage, garden, and field passed like spectres before his eyes; on he drove, madly overtaking and passing other equipages, the occupants of which would often rein in their horses, and gaze wonderingly at the fine-looking gentleman, with the demon’s glare in his wild eyes. The sun was low before he gained Florissant; but he thought not of this. Stopping at the first house on the outskirts of the village, he made enquiries for the cashier; but the inmates knew nothing of the man. At every house in the vicinity, he repeated his question only to obtain the same answer. Finally, he gained the village tavern. Its keeper, a stout man of about forty, looked at the questioner suspiciously.

“Never heern of him, before,” was his answer. There were several men in the room, listeners to the conversation. One of them stole out with Mr. Merton, and whispered to him:—

“Drive away from the inn a little, an’ I reckon I ken tell you somethin’.”

Mr. Merton drove further on, and awaited the man, a shabby looking fellow, whose countenance was by no means of a kind to inspire confidence.

“Stranger, if you want to know whar’ that man is, it must be wuth your knowin’.”

“Certainly it is,” answered Merton unconscious of the other’s drift. “Tell me quick.”

“I don’t know but what it may be wuth five dollars to you.”

“Oh!” answered Merton, fumbling in his pocket, and producing a bill: “There now, for heaven’s sake be quick.”

“Well, that ‘ere cashier, is expected to be back to that house to-morrow

mornin', but he's bribed the fellur as runs the place not to let it out."

Not waiting to thank his informant, Merton returned to the inn.

"See here," he said to the landlord, "step aside one moment, I want to see you about something important." The landlord's eye kindled with speculation, and, rubbing his hands briskly, he retired with his man to a corner remote from the crowd.

"My friend," said Merton, "I want to stay here all night, but very privately. You won't mention my being here to any one, will you?" And to add emphasis to his request, he pressed an eagle into the landlord's palm.

"All k'rect, sir. An' now I come to think of it, the man you enquired for is to be here before to-morrow noon." What a wondrous quickener of the memory is money.

The night passed quietly, and next morning found Mr. Merton up fresh and early awaiting his enemy. As it neared noon his anxiety increased, and he began drinking heavily. Noon arrived, but no cashier. Mr. Merton still continued to ply his glass, and one hour later, he was buried in a heavy sleep.

How long he slept he knew not; but he was awakened suddenly by some one shaking him violently.

Starting to his feet, and leaning on the table for support, he found himself facing the shabby man who had first volunteered his evidence. "Stranger," he said, "you'd better git around lively. The chap you are after's ben here, and has seed you, and is now making tracks for Ferguson."

"Go and get my buggy, quick," said Mr. Merton hoarsely. His head was dizzy, and there was a strange ringing in his ears; but he was sufficiently conscious to follow the bent of his revenge.

A minute later, he was climbing into the buggy; but so unsteady was he, that it required the help of his disinterested informant.

"Be keerful stranger, keep your hand steady. That hoss is a leetle too lively for you."

He had scarcely spoken, when Merton, turning the horse towards Ferguson, raised his whip, and brought it down with all his strength upon the poor animal's back. The horse reared violently, and so sudden was the jerk, that the reins slipped from the driver's hands. Affrighted still more by the dragging reins, the horse lost all control, and started off at full speed. Mr. Merton caught hold of the dashboard and held on mechanically. About a hundred yards down the road was a small railed bridge, crossing a stream. Quicker than words can tell it, they had arrived there, and as the runaway swerved to one side, one of the buggy's wheels was caught by the railing, and the sudden shock threw Mr.

Merton violently from the vehicle. Before the horse could extricate himself, several men had caught his bridle, and were calming him by patting him gently. But Mr. Merton moved not from the place where he had fallen. The partially-healed wound upon his head had again been opened, and he was senseless. They carried him to the inn, where it required many hours to revive him.

The next day he was too weak and dizzy to leave the inn. He was prompted more than once to send word to his wife, but pride restrained him; he would keep the shameful accident forever as a secret.

Wednesday afternoon had come, and he was much better. But it would not do to start for home till all the marks of his bruises had disappeared. About three o'clock he fell into a troubled slumber. Dreams crowded upon him. He was again in quest of the cashier; and had pursued him through a wild country. Suddenly his enemy could flee no further, for he had come to the brow of a precipice. "I've got you, now, you villain," cried the pursuer. But what was his horror and dismay, when the cashier suddenly lifted Ada from the ground, raised her in his arms, and held her over the precipice. He could see the calm, sweet look of his daughter, as she stretched out her hands, entreating him to come and save her. Suddenly the dream changed. Ada was lost in a trackless desert. He wandered about through the blinding sand in quest of her; and at times would catch a glimpse of her white garments. But ere he reached her, a great mountain of sand rose between them, and he would again be baffled. Worn out, finally, by the search, he threw himself upon the sand, and fell into a sort of doze. He was aroused by the voice he so well knew. "I am not lost, papa: it is you who are lost. Come home, papa."

The loving, little face, sorrowful, but bright with tears then bent down to his, and imprinted a soft kiss upon his cheek.

Then he awoke. He started up in bed, and as his eyes opened, he seemed to see Ada thinning into the darkness of the evening, and he still felt the warm kiss upon his cheek.

"My God," he cried involuntarily, "was Ada really beside me? Did she say, 'Papa, come home?' "

"John Merton," said a man who was sitting beside his bed, and whom he had not noticed before, "no one has been here but myself. Do you know me, John?"

"Why, Clarke, how came you here?"

"I chanced to hear that you were in this inn," answered Mr. Clarke, who was an old friend, "and I considered it my business to see you at once. John, John, my dear fellow, is it possible that you have left your wife and child,

alone and unprotected, living, as you do, upon the very outskirts of the city?"

John pressed his hand to his forehead; the voice of his child was still ringing in his ears.

"Yes, it is possible; and I am a brute, Clarke, as sure as we are in this room; I know that I am needed at home. Ada has called me, my hand is unsteady, my brain is whirling; for the sake of our old friendship drive me home; and hurry, hurry, for my brain is burning with anxiety."

Mr. Clarke, as he listened to these earnest words, grew still more grave. A few moments later, he helped the anxious father into a buggy, and then jumping in himself gave free rein to the horse. And the animal gathering all its energy bounded away into the night, as though he too were affected by some dread presentiment.

CHAPTER XV

*Then like tired breezes didst thou sink to rest,
Nor one, one pang the awful change confessed.
Death stole in silence o'er that lovely face,
And touched each feature with a new-born grace;
On cheek and brow unearthly beauty lay,
And told that life's poor cares had passed away!
In my last hour, be Heaven so kind to me!
I ask no more but this—to die like thee.*

—Sprague.

THE afternoon when Mr. Merton left his home was most melancholy to his wife. It was becoming plainer to her every day that one prop of her happiness had been removed—perhaps forever. No longer could her mind dwell with delight on the kindest of husbands; no longer could she count upon his prompt return at the conclusion of his business engagements; no longer could she listen with pleasure to his droll remarks; for his gaiety was departing with his sober habits. In proportion as her love for her husband weakened, did her affection for Ada strengthen.

The hours had worn slowly on, till the clock marked eight of the evening; and they were still waiting for the familiar footstep. Ada, noticing her mother's distress, did all in her power to make the time pass pleasantly. She played her liveliest melodies upon the piano, and sang over and over the "Eve of St. Agnes;" and as her mother listened, and thought of the child's generous efforts, she felt her whole heart going out to her daughter.

"Ada, come here, my child."

When Ada, leaving the piano, had nestled in her mother's bosom, the mother pressed her warmly to her heart, as though some one were seeking to wrest the child away.

"Ada, Ada, my child, you are my only love, now. Without you this earth would be a hell."

"Oh, mamma!" cried the child deprecatingly.

"I tell you, my child," pursued the madly doting mother, "I would rather suffer all the hideous torments I have ever read or heard of, than be separated from you for a day. O Ada, you are my whole joy, my whole happiness."

The child was astonished at her mother's almost incoherent passionateness; she knew not that the human heart must ever have some God; that nothing but the Infinite can satisfy its cravings; and that if the heart recklessly spurn the

Infinite, it must turn with an unappeasable and ever unsatisfied hunger to the finite.

“Mamma,” she said “I know that you love me very much: why can’t you love God too?”

“It is out of the question, my child. If you could but read my mind you would readily understand me. It may be, my darling, that, as you once said, I am blind and cannot see the light; but certain it is, my dearest, that I cannot, even for a moment, firmly believe that there is a God. But to tell you the truth, Ada, since the occurrences of the last few days, I almost wish I could believe.”

“O, I’m so glad you say that,” said Ada; “for if you wish to believe, God will surely in His great, great love open your eyes.”

“It is dreadful to live this way,” continued the mother. “Your poor papa is becoming so unhappy, darling.”

“Poor papa,” sighed Ada. “God doesn’t seem to grant my prayers quickly; but I am sure that you and papa will soon see things in the true way.”

For some time they sat in silence, and motionless save only for the passionate caresses of the mother. Finally, Mrs. Merton said:—

“Ada, your voice sounded strange this evening; you seem to be weak and tired.”

“Yes, mamma, I have felt a little weak for the past three days, and there’s a pain in my side. I feel very tired to-night.”

“Yes, my dearest, and I noticed you coughing a little. Let me take you to bed, this instant; your health is much too precious to be wasted in night watches for *your father*.” There was a tone of bitterness in the last two words.

Ada begged to stay up, so fearful was she that her mother would be overwhelmed by sadness, if left alone. But the mother was firm. She helped the child to bed and, kissing her with even more passionateness than she had before evinced, left the child for the night. No sooner was Ada alone, than rising to her knees in bed she commenced her night prayers.

Her very heart seemed to speak in behalf of father and mother. She passed almost an hour in this position, and lay down, not that she had finished her prayer, but from very weakness. The pain in her side continued to increase, and she experienced a sense of weakness growing upon her. But her mind seemed to become more acute. The slightest sound arrested her attention, for she could not turn her thoughts from her father out in the chilly night. Then flashed through her imagination, the vision of her mother, sitting tearless, alone, sorrowful by the hearth.

“Poor mamma,” she thought, “how unhappy she must now be. If she

believed in God, she would have some one to whom she might now speak her sorrows.”

The thought of her mother’s loneliness seemed to haunt her brain: she could not dismiss it: the image of her mother alone and weeping without one heart near by to sympathize so clung to her, that at last she resolved to arise, and bear her company. Putting on the beautiful garments of the morning, she stole gently towards her mother’s room. The night had grown quite chill, and, as she walked along the damp hall, a shiver passed through her frame, and the feeling of weakness increased.

The door reached, she stood for a moment with her hand upon the knob, doubting whether she should enter. Suddenly she felt a difficulty in respiration, the pain in the side became violent, and her head grew dizzy. Throwing open the door, she staggered into the room.

“Mamma, help me—I am ill.” This was all she could say.

“O Ada!” cried the agonized mother, catching the child in her arms, “tell me quick, darling, what is the matter?” and she laid the child tenderly on her bed.

“I find it hard to breathe, mamma, and the pain at my side, and I’m dizzy.” Ada’s voice had a strange ring in it, and this symptom frightened Mrs. Merton most of all.

“Maggie, Maggie,” she called out, going to the hallway. In a short time, the maid appeared.

“Go, Maggie, quick, call Bob, and tell him to run for life, and get the nearest doctor—O my darling, my child,” she cried hastening back to Ada, “my child—you must not, you shall not be ill.”

“Poor mamma,” Ada murmured, and tears of pity were on her cheek. “Get me my crucifix, mamma.”

“No dearest, I cannot leave you. Do you breathe easier yet, my child?”

“I—I think not, mamma.”

Maggie just then entered the room with the patient’s crucifix. Ada clutched it tightly, and kissed it with love beaming upon her face.

“Mamma,” she whispered, “I am very happy; but I believe I am going to die. Send for a priest.”

The words were scarcely spoken, when Maggie hastened from the room; the poor mother grew ashen pale, and threw herself upon her knees, beside the fair child.

“Come, my darling, don’t think of death.—O God, O God! when will the doctor come?” In solemn moments the name of God *will* rise to the

unbeliever's lip.

Ten minutes later, a doctor arrived post haste. After a brief examination, he shook his head.

"O doctor, what is it? tell me, quick." Mrs. Merton entreated, as she caught his arm, and fixed her eyes upon him as though to read his thoughts.

"Be calm, madam.—God help you; is she an only child?—But she *may* recover. It is a case of aggravated pneumonia. She has been suffering from it slightly for some days back, very probably; for her case is more advanced than I generally find at the first visit."

May none of us ever see such a look of despair as settled upon Mrs. Merton's face. Pneumonia! it was a disease terrible in its ravages that year!

The doctor assisted by Maggie did all that could be done, while the mother with that look of despair which never changed stood like a marble statue, her eyes bent upon the fragile child.

Presently a priest entered the room.

"Mamma," whispered Ada, "this Communion will be for you and papa."

At sight of the priest, Mrs. Merton moved towards him with an angry gesture; but the appealing glance of Ada changed her purpose, and with a moan she allowed him to do his work alone.

It was already nearing the dawn, and, for the first time since the child's sickness, she thought of her husband.

"Bob," she said, "go and scour the town, and bring *that man* to his daughter."

When Mrs. Merton entered the room again she saw upon Ada's face the perfect repose of tranquil happiness.

Monday and Tuesday passed slowly; but the mother never for a moment left the side of the suffering child; never for a moment relaxed her watchfulness. Often Maggie begged her to rest for a short time, but to no avail. Sister Felicitas shared the poor lady's vigil, and, despite their many disparities, a silent love grew up between them.

It was about seven o'clock on Wednesday evening. Ada was lying in a sort of slumber. Beside her were Maggie, Sister Felicitas, and the mother, all three watching the child's slightest movement. Of a sudden, Ada's face began to change; first it looked sad, and then affectionate, and finally she opened her eyes, and gazed about her.

"Is papa here?" she said.

"Ada, my darling, are you suffering pain?" asked the heart-broken mother,

resting her cheek against the face of her child.

“Very little, mamma. I thought papa was near me, and in trying to touch him I awoke. But I will see him some day, please God—but not here mamma. Are you listening?—are you near me?”

“Speak, my angel; I am here.”

“Then tell poor papa that I leave him my—dearest love.” She spoke with difficulty; but the light of a happiness rarely experienced in this world shone upon her like a glory.

At times, Sister Felicitas would raise the crucifix to the dying child’s lips, and with a look of gratitude, she would kiss it with inexpressible tenderness. The mother was speechless with agony; but not a tear started from her eyes. She stood statue-like, gazing as one who looks upon all that is precious for the last time. Suddenly a brightness not of this world came over the child’s features; she rose half-way in bed, looking with eager eyes as upon some vision. Then turning towards her mother, she smiled sweetly, and said;—

“Mamma, I’m going home.—Jesus! Mary!”

At that moment a hasty step was heard upon the stairs; but when Mr. Merton stepped breathless into the room, he saw a nun upon her knees, Maggie crying bitterly, and his wife gazing fixedly upon the body of his darling Ada!

CHAPTER XVI

*The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted; they have torn me, and I bleed;
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.*
—Byron.

FOR a moment Mr. Merton stood like one bereft of his senses. The room seemed to turn round and round; lights gleamed before his eyes; and his very heart stood still. Then there flashed through his brain the remembrance of the God whom he had so often mocked; whom he had so bitterly denied; who now turned upon him with the power of His right arm.

“My God! my God!” he moaned, striking his forehead with his hands.

For the first time the statue-like woman turned from the dead child, and fixing her large, tearless eyes upon him, broke into a loud, harsh, grating laugh.

“My God, my God,” she repeated with disdain; “*you, you, YOU* come here with talk of God; you come to mock me with your lying tongue. Look there;” she went on pointing to the body; “do you see that lovely form; that fair brow, never yet ruffled by an impure, an unholy thought; those lips that smiled with a beauty I never, never more shall see? Where now is the little life that was worth a million such as yours? Gone, gone, and gone forever. All that beauty is but clay, earth, and the worms shall devour it. Never more shall Ada’s loving heart beat against mine; never more shall her happy voice bring joy to my bosom; never more shall her dear smile, her warm kiss bear joy and sweetness to my bereaved heart—for she is gone, gone! O, it is too cruel; it cannot be. Such a noble nature was not made for a few brief years. She is not dead—Ada, my darling, my love, my child, my only child, speak to me. Let your voice but whisper, so that I know you live.—O, it is too cruel—Ada, my child, my child speak to me.” And she threw herself beside the lifeless form, and covered the serene brow with kisses.

“O Mary, my wife, I deserve it all; it is my fault,” cried the agonized, humiliated husband. “But be calm, dear Mary: the child is dead.”

“Ah,” she answered turning upon him in a phrensy of rage, “*you* talk of being calm! you, who have taught me that death is an eternal separation! Away from me, you fiend. She is *not* dead; and you who have taken away from me my God, would now take away the loveliest heart that ever beat.—Speak to me, Ada! Ada, my child speak to me.”

Sister Felicitas now came forward, and laying her hand upon Mrs. Merton’s brow, led the poor mother to a chair; and the husband, fearing that

his presence might excite his wife to madness, bent one longing lingering look upon the child's angelic features, and repaired to his own room—but not to rest.

Up and down he walked, “reaping the whirlwind he had so carefully sown.” In his ears rang a text of scripture that had impressed him in his early years, “Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me.” His pride was shattered, and in the supreme bitterness of the moment, his eyes were fully opened to the light.

“Yes,” he bitterly acknowledged, “I have fought against God; I have tried to despise Him; I have cast Him from my heart, and endeavored to root Him from my mind; I have shattered the faith of a wife; and now I find that His arm is not shortened.—My God, my God, have pity on me; I am not worthy to breathe Thy hallowed name.—O sainted Ada, pray for your traitorous father.” And he sank upon his knees, and bent his head, and prayed, with the blinding tears running down his cheek, for forgiveness, for peace, for resignation.

He was aroused by the entrance of Maggie, whose face was marked by an expression worse even than grief.

“O, Mr. Merton,” she cried, “for God's sake come to your wife; she laughs, and smiles, and insists on sending for more doctors, and says that Ada is sleeping too long.”

His darkest foreboding was realized. His wife, too, was in danger of being taken from him; but by a still more horrid monster than death. Entering the solemn apartment, he saw the mother still gazing fondly on the corpse, and saying;—

“You are sleeping too long, Ada. Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”

At the noise of his footfall, she turned and fronted him, without, it would seem, recognizing that it was her husband.

“Kind sir,” she said, “if you have pity for me, go and get the best doctors of the city. She may still be cured.”

“Mary, my dear wife,” answered the hapless man, “can you not see that our child is dead?”

“'Tis a lie—a black, black lie. Leave me, sir, leave me, and get the best physicians.—Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”

Mr. Merton, thinking that the testimony of the best medical experts might gain her belief, resolved on fulfilling her behest. It was early dawn, when he left the house; and as the morning sun covered the earth with beauty, it shone upon a tearless mother, still crying:—

“Ada, my child, my child, speak to me.”

CHAPTER XVII

*Lay her i' the earth,
And from her pure and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring.*

—*Shakespeare.*

THE physicians held their useless consultation, and assured Mrs. Merton that the child was dead. But not a tear dimmed the mother's eye. She threw herself beside her child, and from time to time moaned in a manner that would touch the most callous heart. She was insensible to all about her, one person only excepted, and that was her husband.

If he entered the room she would kindle with fury, denouncing him as the destroyer of her happiness.

Dressed in her first communion clothes, and with a fresh chaplet of roses, lilies and violets about her brow, Ada lay in her coffin, the serene, youthful, tranquil face still seeming to triumph over the destroying hand of death.

Beside the coffin was Sister Felicitas looking with tearful love upon "the angel of the convent." One by one, during the day, her little school-mates, robed for the occasion in their white communion dresses, entered the room to take one last, regretful look at the face of her whom in life they had so revered.

The unhappy father stood without, for he feared to madden his wife by appearing before her. The previous night of suffering had marked his features with an unsparing hand. As each little girl stepped from the apartment of the dead into the hall, he would stay her, and ask humbly to be remembered in her prayers.

Sister Felicitas was greatly alarmed at the condition of Mrs. Merton, who, since the preceding Sunday, had neither eaten anything nor taken a moment's repose.

"My dear Madam," she whispered, when the children had gone, "come, let me take you to your room for a while. Rest for an hour or so. It will refresh you wonderfully; and then, no doubt, you will be able to weep."

The mother ceased moaning for the moment, and turning her burning eyes upon the nun, she said;—

"Tell me; is Ada dead?"

"Yes, Mrs. Merton, she is."

"Then I shall never rest again," and moaning as before, she again addressed herself to the dead child. For another hour, she was motionless, and were it not for her moaning one would have been unable to discern in her any trace of life.

Then raising her eyes to the nun, she again spoke;—

“Is my child dead forever?”

“No, dear madam,” Sister Felicitas made answer; “she is in the glory of God even now, I trust, and at the last day, her body will again be joined fair and incorruptible to the pure spirit that made it be so beloved by us all in this poor life.”

“And do you believe in God?”

“Assuredly, madam.”

Mrs. Merton peered around the room with suspicious eyes, as if fearing that she were watched, and whispered;—

“Where is God?”

“Everywhere, dear Madam. In Him we live, move and have our being.”

The poor lady moaned, as she again sought Ada’s face, and muttered, “If it were only so; but I know it is false.”

Saturday was the last sad day that was to see Ada’s mortal remains upon the face of the earth, and in the morning accompanied by friends, and all the children of the convent, the bereaved parents set out for Calvary Cemetery. Mrs. Merton still evinced a loathing for her husband, and clung to Sister Felicitas.

It was a beautiful morning of spring; one of nature’s halcyon days; a day that would warm the blood of an old man till he felt young again; a day that ran riot in the early wealth of nature’s gifts. And the birds sang with such a sweet sense of new life. The very flowers seemed alive to the smiles of the sun. “But all things are dark to sorrow,” and the childless mother, heeding neither flower nor bird, nor tree, nor field, strained her eyes eagerly after the white-plumed hearse and moaned;—

“Ada, my child, my child!”

And now they stand around Ada’s last resting place; the mother leaning upon Sister Felicitas; the father looking prematurely old, standing opposite his wife, and beside the priest in attendance. While the rites of the dead are being performed, a little bird on a tree beside the grave is making the place vocal with his music.

Already the last prayers have been recited, the coffin has been lowered, and the saddest sound that mortal ear knows, the dull thud of the dirt falling upon the coffin, is heard. But one handful had fallen, when the mother releasing herself from the hold of Sister Felicitas, and drawing a dagger (Mr. Merton remembered her promise now) said, in a voice unnaturally calm and clear;—

“My child shall not be taken from me so; stop your work, men, for I swear

that I will stab the first man that covers my child from me forever.”

As she stood there with her large wildly-flashing eyes, her form drawn up to its full height, her determined face, and the jewelled hand clasping the dagger, a thrill of silent horror went through the assemblage. Some of the little children hid their faces. A dead silence, broken only by the singing of that one little bird, came over all. John Merton was the first to speak.

“Mary, my dear,” he cried in imploring accents, “forgive me for having so long and so cruelly deceived you. Ada is not gone forever; but is at rest in God. Put away that dagger, Mary; you are unreasonably excited. We shall soon meet our darling”—his strong voice faltered as he spoke—“in a brighter world.”

“Liar, fiend!” screamed the wife; “*you* dare to talk of God; *you* dare to speak of Ada in a brighter land; *you* who plucked the idea of God from my soul. You have taken my God from me, so that I shall never find Him again.” There was a pitiful sadness, the sadness of a broken heart, in these last words.

“Yes,” she continued in the midst of a painful silence, “you have taught me knowledge of good and evil—and may the day I first met you be accursed. Hypocrite, liar, may no happiness ever again find place in your blackened heart.—And *you* tell me there is a God! Where is he? tell me that! O God, O God, if I could but find You!”

“I tell you, Mary,” answered the stricken husband, “I acknowledge it before the world, I have cruelly, bitterly deceived you. I was a madman, a fool; and like the fool I said in my heart there is no God. But never did my mind fully consent to what I taught. Trust me, Mary, never, never for one moment did I fully believe what I taught you to believe but too well.”

Mrs. Merton made him no answer; Sister Felicitas was whispering to her gently; and Mr. Merton signed to the grave diggers, who were staring with amazement at the unwonted scene, to continue with their work. But they had not fairly begun, when the mother sprang forward dagger in hand. With incredible quickness, Mr. Merton was beside her, and stayed her hand in the very act of striking the nearest grave-digger.

She struggled violently with her husband, and before he had wrested the dagger from her grasp, she had inflicted upon him several slight wounds. Then, as if inspired by a new idea, she attempted to jump into the open grave. But they stayed her.

“Let me alone,” she shrieked, “I cannot find God here; I will go with Ada, and perhaps in her company I may meet Him.”

She became more violent; strong but kind hands were laid upon her, and she was held fast till the grave was filled. But it was evident to all that she was,

for the time, insane—nay, a maniac. In the intervals of her mad strugglings, she would stare around wildly, and cry out;

“God! Where is He? They have taken Him away from me, and I shall never find Him more!”

CHAPTER XVIII

*The loppéd tree in time may grow again,
Most naked plants renew both fruit and flower,
The sorriest wight may find release from pain,
The driest soil suck in some moistening shower.*
—Southwell.

*O there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our friend.*

Wordsworth.

BITTER thoughts, useless regrets, gnawing remorse and dreadful fears tortured the sleepless brain of John Merton on the night succeeding the scene at Calvary Cemetery. Mary Merton had lost her reason, and was now under the kindly charge of Sister Felicitas, who seemed to exercise a most soothing influence over the unhappy woman. Her last oft-repeated cry still rang in his ears;—

“Tell me, tell me, where is my God. They have hidden Him from me, and I shall never see Him more.” And now without even the presence of his wife, the wretched man felt with stinging consciousness that he was alone in the world. But could he not turn to God? This was the thought he had been debating since Ada’s death. With the dreadful effects of his unbelief coming home to him in the very present, his sins seemed to his troubled imagination too heinous for pardon. The enemy of God, fearing to lose his soul in one way, was resolved to gain it in another. “Yes,” cried the evil voice, “your happiness is gone; you would be foolish to ask God for help; for you have treated Him too badly. Make away with yourself, and do not wait for more troubles.” The man trembled at the thought; still it had a sort of fascination for him. The most dangerous hour in Mr. Merton’s life had now come. But a new saint was praying for him, doubtless. How long his dangerous reverie would have continued it is impossible to say, had not Maggie entered the room. Maggie noticed his despondency immediately; and she felt that her master might now begin a new life, if she but conducted her part successfully. The kind woman’s eyes were red and swollen with constant weeping; in her hand she held a book.

“Mr. Merton, my dear master,” she began with a countenance in which smiles and tears were holding a doubtful contest for supremacy; “Mr. Merton, my dear master, God forgive me for all the hard things, I have been sayin’ against you, such as callin’ you a grand Turk, the great Mogul and such like.

There was a time when I really did be hoping that the hand of God would fall heavy on you—but I never thought that you'd be made so miserable. You've been a good master to me, Mr. Merton, and I would do anything to serve you; and you may be thinking it bold, God love you, but I've come to ask you to read this little chapter, which I have left open." And she laid the book on the table at his elbow. "I know how you feel, sir, but I know too that if you wait a little, you'll see your way clear—which I'd like to see anybody say anything against it."

Maggie was shrewd enough to perceive that her visit was not wholly unwelcome, and acting on the principle of letting well-enough alone, curtsied out of the room. Merton, with no little curiosity, picked up the book from the table, and read. It was the chapter on the prodigal son; and as his eye ran along the lines, streams of softening grace poured into his soul. Tears came to his eyes at the thought of so merciful a God. Over and over again, he read the sublime chapter; and at each reading he gained fresh courage and strength. At length he put the book down, resolving that he too would arise and go to his Father's house; and forthwith like a suddenly remembered dream, there came back to him, glowing in the rosy light of hope, the memories of his boyhood's faith and innocence. Bright visions of old faces, old friends, old scenes returned with the vividness of yesterday. He remembered, too, how previous to departing for the non-sectarian school, he had paid a last visit to his teacher and father-confessor at the St. Louis University; how the good father had earnestly warned him to guard his faith; how in shaking hands at parting, the priest had said, "John, my boy, the day may come when you will be in deep sorrow; sorrow of a kind that no earthly consolation can assuage; but remember, as long as I live, you shall find a friend who will do all that can be done to be of service to you."

This priest still lived; now indeed, an old man; but hale, active and with the same warm heart. Many years ago, he had called on Mr. Merton; but the fallen Catholic had shown him such marked coldness as to imply that further intercourse would be disagreeable. Now, however, the humbled man was resolved to open himself entirely to the good father. Before Mr. Merton had concluded his reverie, day was shining into his apartment. Rising to leave he called Maggie to him.

"Maggie," he said, "you have done me a great—a very great service. One thing more I ask of you—that you pray fervently for me to obtain the grace of making a good confession." And as Mr. Merton turned from her, Maggie cried for very joy.

Half an hour later, a haggard, care-worn man presented himself at the St. Louis University, and called for Father Elliott. After a short delay, there

entered the parlor an aged but tall and stately gentleman, with a venerable benevolent face. He recognized Mr. Merton, and with a smile so genial that his visitor felt in better cheer, he grasped his hand in both of his own.

“Why John, John! How delighted I am to see you, old fellow. I have been awaiting you for years, my dear boy. So you’re in trouble? But come right up to my room, John. I know part of your story already. But I’ll warrant before you leave me, that you’ll look much happier than you do now.”

“I am sure, Father,” answered John, “that you will be able to lighten my load. Indeed, I now feel the same confidence in you, as when I was your little scholar.”

In great troubles, there is nothing that so lightens the heart, as to have a sympathetic friend: and as John Merton told his sad tale to his genial confessor, every word seemed to roll a burden from his bosom. Several hours had flown by before he had come to an end, and received absolution.

“My dear sir,” said the Father, “be patient for a week, say till next Sunday, and I am sure, by that time I will be able to give you a good account of your wife. In the meantime, don’t go near her; but leave all to me. Soon, you will perceive in these apparent calamities the finger of our good Father, who in His mercy by taking your child pure and untainted from this world, will have led you and your wife to the true Church. Here now is a book, which I wish you to read carefully. And next Wednesday afternoon, mind, you are to come here and stop with us till Sunday—a retreat you know, in preparation for a new life. Then on Sunday, you will be well prepared, please God, for receiving into your heart the divine Saviour who has shown you so much mercy. Now, John, I will see to Mrs. Merton immediately. Good bye, my dear fellow,—you know where my room is now; and I expect to see you often.”

True to his promise, Father Elliott set out immediately for the convent. He had formed a theory to the effect that as Mrs. Merton’s seeming insanity had been caused by the idea that Ada had fallen back into the nothingness whence she came, so she could be restored to reason, by being led gradually to believe in the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the life of the blessed. Once that she might hope to meet Ada again, her mind would become tranquilized.

Admitted into her presence, he found the poor lady pacing restlessly up and down her narrow apartment.

“O, sir,” she cried upon seeing him, “can you tell me where God has hidden Himself? I have lost Him, and I fear He is gone forever.”

The zealous priest answered her gently, and, by his kind but earnest manner, soon won her confidence. After a long conversation, he left her

calmer, but still unconvinced.

Day after day, he repeated his visits; and insensibly preparing her mind, he finally brought her on to assent by reason to the existence of God, and then to the immortality of the soul. She listened intently; suddenly the whole truth appeared to flash upon her; and as she realized the happy change, tears, the first she had shed since Ada's death, flooded her eyes. From that hour, she quickly recovered.

In the meantime, Mr. Merton entered upon his retreat with a will, and the three days spent in retirement were to him the most precious of his life. On Sunday morning, he received with tender love and in all humility our blessed Lord. Long after the Mass was over, he still was praying, when a light touch upon the shoulder called him back to the world. It was Father Elliott, who motioned him to come outside. Following the priest, who was dressed in secular clothes, to the door, he saw a carriage with no—yes—it was old Bob himself for the driver.

"Why Bob," he gasped.

"Lor' lub you, massa."—

"Jump in, my dear fellow—not a word now to man, woman or child," said the father, whose smiling face spoke volumes. "Let the horses fly, Bob. And mind you, John, don't ask me a single question."

Off rattled the coach; Father Elliott threw himself back in his seat and smiled at Merton, who scrupulously mindful of his companion's monition asked no questions, but resigned himself to the broad field of conjecture. In as short a time, almost, as it takes to narrate it, they pulled up before the convent, gained admittance, and seated themselves in the parlor. Mr. Merton was just beginning to collect his thoughts, when a lady entered the room, and with a cry of joy threw herself upon his bosom. It was his wife, needless to say; her face still bearing lines of sorrow, but sorrow that had been chastened and refined.

"My dear, John; thanks to God, that our eyes have at length been opened."

"Thank God," echoed the husband with no less fervor. "Ada has indeed gained her prayers."

"Yes, John, and though my heart is still mourning her loss; yet if I had the power to call her back now, I would not do so."

"Nor I, my dear. A few years more, and, please God, we shall meet her in Heaven."

Six years have passed; and Mr. and Mrs. Merton, still young, still active, are happier than ever we knew them to be in the past. God has blessed them

with another child, master Robin Merton, who, as Bob declares, “am a marble ob engine-annuity.” Although a good boy, Robin is something of a contrast to Ada: he has a remarkable facility for creating minor disturbances, and after he has “worrited” the cook to death by stealing her preserves and pastries, and set Maggie running after him on vengeance intent for “mussing up everything,” he makes his mamma’s lap a harbor of refuge, and asks,

“I say, mamma, Robin’s like sisser Ada, ain’t he?” This question being generally unequivocally negated, Robin toddles off in great disgust, to effect new conquests.

When, occasionally of a fine day, they take him out to Calvary Cemetery, and show him a little grave blossoming with roses, lilies and violets; and tell him what Ada had said of these flowers, he looks very serious, and says,

“Poor sisser Ada! Bobby’s doin to be dood too; so’s he can do to heaven tum day, an’ see his little sisser.”

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Candles’ Beams* by Francis J. Finn]