

"Of what pattern?" smilingly asked the priest.

"Keep to the prevailing style," the treasurer answered, "that explains all. My brother-in-law, who has built so many altars, surely ought to know; his motto is: 'Keep to the prevailing style, and you are safe.'"

"You're right," exclaimed one who seemed to understand.

The Reverend Pastor rose. He considered it his duty to stand up in behalf of the Main Altar. "It is not antique nor in bizarre taste nor of distorted design, but fashioned by masters in the happiest Baroque style, and artistic in every detail; the whole so perfectly conceived and executed it were almost impossible to reproduce its like nowadays. The centre-piece, the frame of the miraculous picture, is a masterpiece of first class, for which the collectors and antiquarians have offered big sums. The whole country would laugh at us if we replaced the old, priceless altar for one of modern make, not one tenth its equal in worth or finish."

"For five thousand marks my brother-in-law will build one higher than the present altar," the treasurer assured.

"That is hardly a telling point," a neighbor remarked; "the tallest people are not always the wisest nor the best."

"I would emphatically oppose the treasurer," the priest concluded, "should he motion to replace our Main Altar by a dear and less valuable one;" then agitatedly: "indeed, I affirm, if this altar, this precious work of art from the halcyon past, were taken away, I would not desire to officiate in this church any longer."

"It was not meant quite so," said the treasurer in a lowered voice; "I wish to withdraw my suggestion."

"Two or three sets of exquisite holiday vestments might appeal to the Chapter," some one proposed in his turn; "for five or six thousand marks our church could purchase the finest for ten miles around. Why not procure them, when the money is on hand?"

This plan was rather pleasing to many.

The Rev. Pastor got up to speak; "I commend the last suggestion and as pastor ought to be the first one to favor it. However, before voting on the same I have a consideration to offer. You may receive it as you will; as a matter of conscience, I must tell you what touches my heart at this hour. Acquainted as you are with the Capital of our Province, I need not tell you that it is a town with eight thousand Protestants and scarcely three hundred Catholic inhabitants. Among the latter, quite a number are blood relatives of ours, who moved thither to find work and are employed there; in respect to these we are like the rich man in the Gospel beside poor Lazarus, who was told to satisfy his hunger with the crumbs from the table of the rich. At high rent they have hired a room where once a fortnight Mass is offered up and sermon is given. For the sick, the children, the old, there is practically no provision. Under these sorry religious conditions how many a soul is lost! What bringing up have the children, in what condition do the aged die, where there is no church, no regular divine service, no resident priest? People more favorably situated can not even suspect the pitiable things which happen in such a place. These conditions could be improved if help were given at the right time. At present a fine, large place in the town, with a plain but neat house on it, is for sale. The latter would do for priest and school house; the lot would accommodate a little church and if need be, afford room for a second house.

The price for house and lot is twelve thousand marks. This is very cheap; the first payment, however, is large, namely, six thousand marks in cash.

Now, then, in view of the great need and poverty of our coreligionists it seems to me a great responsibility, if just in order to get rid of our money, we should purchase for our church which is fully supplied in every detail, rich and ornate vestments or a Main Altar. In a formal way we are justified. Still I think that he who in order personally to absorb the interest on his capital, would dine daily upon truffles and tarts, the while a poor neighbor's family is starving on black bread, would be guilty of a criminal indulgence, in spite of his hundred avowals: 'It is my right.' To put it briefly: We rich villagers have the means to help our destitute Catholic brethren to build a church and school, to have regular religious services and to have a resident pastor in that Protestant district. Then, why not help them? We have simply to will it with a unanimous yes.

Supposing we send two men to the Capital tomorrow, covertly to buy the house and place, laying down as first payment six thousand marks cash—namely the five thousand from the treasury and the one thousand I would contribute, and supposing again that later on the Chapter pay them a visit, during the Octave of Corpus Christi, for example, and would say to them: 'Catholic Brethren, this house and lot, upon which we have paid six thousand marks, is intended as the site for your future parish; there are six thousand marks still due on it which, we trust, you will be able to meet; if not, we are at hand to back you,'—what a grand work that would be in the sight of God and man, a thousand times more commendable than any news article like this: 'The village Ortingen has purchased for five thousand marks, grand, golden vestments,'—don't all of you think so? The thanks our parish would thereby merit from God, from the Catholics of the Diaspora, from the Patron Saint and from the Guardian Angel of the place, from our bishop also, would be worth to us, aside from the good example we thereby give to the whole diocese, a million times more than all our boasting on Corpus Christi Day or at Easter: 'We villagers have the costliest vestments in the land.' May God grant that that which we agree upon may be to his honor and glory!"

The impression which these words produced was great. Generally it takes time and continued exhortation till the soul mellowed to some great, magnanimous deed; on this occasion the resolve was instant; the eyes of the majority spoke their enthusiastic assent to the novel, wholehearted proposition.

Four, five members got up at once to second the suggestion. The oldest among them said: "Certainly it is more conducive to the honor of God, to help introduce the old Catholic worship in a place from which for centuries it has been banished, than to buy a new altar or new vestments, and He will reimburse our parish for what it expends in His name."

"I wish merely to inquire if it be in accordance with the mind of the founders to expend these moneys for the benefit of outside parishes?" This query came from the taverner.

"Your question has already been answered by the previous speaker," the priest rejoined.

"The foundation was made by our ancestors and forefathers for the support and spread of our holy Catholic Religion. Having no present or immediate want for the money, it is surely permissible to invest it for a religious purpose in

behalf of our poor, oppressed Catholic brethren. We infer this from the very name of our Church, 'the Catholic,' which means universal, whose children the world over are brothers and sisters. This was taught us by the first Christians, who from their surplus assisted their poor straitened brethren in Jerusalem, for which St. Paul praised them. It was this spirit that actuated the founders of this parish, and could they come back to us from beyond the grave, they would assuredly tell us: 'Not only is it in accordance with our intention, but it is our will, that you help your poor brethren of the Diaspora.' In conclusion and by way of throwing light upon the condition of these scattered Catholics let us hear what our respected teacher who was brought up there will tell us at first hand about the Diaspora."

To be continued.

A CONVERSION.

BY JOSEPH CAREY.

A plain and simple story should be told in a plain and simple and straightforward way, and that is the way a priest recently told me this story. It was not an experience of his, but that of a brother priest whom he knew well and who, since the events here told, has gone to his reward.

I don't remember just what the conversation was which led up to the story. Possibly we were talking of different experiences which priests on the mission have. At any rate he told this odd story of a conversion which I think is well worth narrating.

Some years ago, Father John, the chief figure of this story, was stationed in a parish on the outskirts of one of our large cities, and in addition to the ordinary parochial duties he attended to the spiritual wants of several institutions, among which was the almshouse. This particular institution was situated in the country about three miles from the parochial house, and whenever a hurry sick-call was sent in, a carriage had to be procured to take the priest over the road. In fine weather this was rather a pleasant ride but in the winter the way was bitterly cold.

Our section of the country here is not favoured very often with real blizzards such as they have in the West, but occasionally they come, and we know how terrible they can be.

Father John had been busy around the parish one day not so many winters ago, but a heavy Western blizzard setting in toward mid-day, piled the snow up so that he was forced to beat a retreat. All afternoon the snow came down heavy and thick and toward nightfall the storm increased to violence. Father John was a zealous man, as events will show, but he certainly hoped that there would be no sick-call on that wild night, as he glanced out of the window before retiring.

It's a strange thing, but sick-calls very often come on just such a night. Whether the depressing effect of the storm has some effect on the sick or not, I don't know, but those who have been sick will often take a turn for the worse during a heavy storm, and the call for the priest goes in.

So on this night of storm, the telephone rang just before midnight. Father John had scarcely got to sleep when he heard the insistent ringing, at first dim and faint, and as he became conscious, loud and insistent. He took down the receiver and his heart sank. It was the alms-house calling.

"Hello—A woman dangerously sick, dying, in fact, and calling for the priest."

Father John called up the livery stable from which they usually got the carriage, but the night man who was in charge absolutely refused to allow a horse out on such a night.

"No, Father," he said. "Sorry, but I don't own them, and I couldn't take the risk. The carriage couldn't get through the storm anyway."

"Send the horse with a saddle—I'll ride it," answered Father John. "No, Father—couldn't do it. Sorry, but it's too much risk. He'd break a leg. Sorry, but I can't do anything for you, Father."

Father John hung up the receiver in dismay. He could not possibly walk the three miles through snow piled up deep. It would be insane to try it, but a horse could get through.

And then he bethought himself of a neighbour, a good Catholic, who ran a grocery store just across the street from the priest's house. He had a good horse.

He called on the telephone and got the neighbour on the wire. "A sick call at the almshouse," he explained briefly. "I tried to get a horse at the stables and they wouldn't give me one. Are you willing to risk your horse on such a night?"

Without hesitation the voice with a good brogue came back over the wire:

"Sure, Father, and a thousand times welcome. I don't care if he breaks four legs. But, Father—"

"Well?" asked the priest.

"I haven't a saddle—can you ride without one?"

"Yes," answered the priest, "I'll hold on somehow."

"All right, Father," responded the grocer. "I'll put a blanket on him. I'll have him right over for you."

Father John dressed hastily and went to the door. In a few minutes the grocer leading his horse appeared from the little barn across the street. The man saluted the priest respectfully and helped him to mount.

"God help you, Father, and bring you safe back," he shouted above the din of the storm.

The priest said nothing, but turned the horse toward the almshouse, and the trembling beast, at first inclined to turn and run for the stable, was goaded on, step by step, on the road which led to the almshouse.

Within the almshouse in the infirmary, dimly lighted, was a woman desperately ill, tossing restlessly about on her narrow cot. She was dying and she knew it. It was over three hours now since she had taken the sudden turn for the worse and at regular intervals she would moan piteously—"the priest—the priest!"

The authorities had been slow to call a priest on such a wild night. They told her the priest could not get through, but she cried and begged till they finally yielded and telephoned to the priest's house. Then she was more extended, but an hour passed, and two, and still no priest arrived, and she had begun crying again.

On the next cot to her in the infirmary lay a woman also dying, a fine, strong creature she had been, but now she was a shadow of herself, dying slowly from a terrible disease, an outcast from society, a moral and physical wreck. She exemplified terribly in her pain-racked body the truth of the biblical saying that the wages of sin is death. She was annoyed at the crying of the dying women for the priest.

"The priest! the priest!" she would mumble sarcastically, "much good the priest will do you!"

Finally she was so annoyed at the constant cries of the dying woman that she lifted herself up in bed and shouted across—

"Shut up, you fool! Don't you hear the storm? Why, a dog wouldn't leave its shelter this night. Your priest won't come. They think a lot too much of themselves to come out on a night like this for the likes of you and me. Shut up, you fool!"

She had hardly finished this tirade when Father John appeared.

Step by step along the highway, the good old horse had carefully picked the way, at times up to its girth in snow. The priest had almost despaired, but he had urged the beast on, praying earnestly meanwhile to Our Lord, lover of souls, to bring him safely to the almshouse.

The wind whistled and howled, the demons of the storm seemed to wish to dismount him, hard snow-flakes nearly blinded him, but he struggled on. It took him over two hours to make the three miles, but he got there.

When he appeared in the infirmary, the dying woman gave a cry of joy.

"Father, they said you wouldn't come. I knew you'd come!"

Her neighbour, the virago, who had scolded her, sat up. There was a look of awe in her face.

"Mister," she said, "how did you do it? How did you get through? Where did you come from?"

"The priest paid no attention whatever to her. He had the dying Catholic to attend to, and he saw he had not much time, so he administered the last Sacraments at once.

When he had finished and was leaving, the virago called him.

"A word, Mister, just a word. I've been a bad one, I have, but I've been thinking some since you came in. I used to be a Christian once, not your kind, you know," she said apologetically, "and in spite of my life I want to die a Christian. Mister, I want to say that I think a minister, who comes out on a night like this to the almshouse, believes what he's preaching. He's good to the unfortunate like Christ was, and I want to join the Church that takes care of the outcasts like me and her," and she nodded toward the woman who had just received the Sacraments.

Not many months after the poor outcast died, a fervent convert fortified by the Sacraments of Holy Church.

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