

ashes from his pipe against the window. He would go down to Madre Marcellina now and have it out!

Madre Marcellina was gossiping on the landing as usual, but she turned at once when she saw Carlo coming down the stairs and pushed open the door into her sitting room. Even the biggest rocker creaked when she sat down, but she laughed comfortably, and the rolls of fat under her chin shook with mirth.

"Hark how the chair complains, so fat I am!" said she. "And what news has thou from our little one to-day?"

Madre Marcellina would always look upon Carlo and Angela as children, for she had cared for both since their babyhood. She was aunt to Carlo, and godmother to slender Angela, in Catholic Italy, where it meant something to be godmother to an orphan baby. The two had grown up under her watchful eyes; playmates at first, then sweethearts, and then, with the family's immigration to America they had been betrothed, with the understanding that the wedding was to be as soon as Carlo could earn enough for a home. But for three years now the little house had waited, and still Angela had not come to fill it with Italian sunshine.

Carlo was thinking of this as he turned his hat in awkward fingers, making up his mind how he should answer Madre Marcellina's question.

"No news," he said at length. "She is no better. The Signora says it is too soon to tell yet. But it is not of that I wished to speak—Madre," he burst out suddenly, "I am weary of novenas! If it had been the will of God that she should walk, the Sacred Heart would have cured her long ago. It is three years now since the accident, and for three years thou hast said to me, 'Carlo, wait—it is not right that thou shouldst have a helpless bride. Wait till Angela can walk again.' And she can not walk! Yet she is not ill, no, nor in pain! I love her, I will wait no longer! If the good God means to heal her, He can heal her just as well when we are married! I will wait no longer for her!"

It was a long speech for the stolid Carlo, and what was worse to Madre Marcellina's mind, a rebellious one. She glared at him for an instant with her sharp little eyes, too amazed to speak. Then she let loose the torrent of her wrath upon him. "Fool!" she called him, "idiot! Imbecile! to marry a girl chained to a wheel chair when he might have the pick of all the Italian maidens in San Francisco! If he must have a wife, let him choose a woman who was not already a living corpse! She would take care of Angela, she loved the child! but she did not mean that he would throw himself away. Or, if Angela it must be, let him wait till the lady doctor, to whose home Angela had been taken a week ago, should have cured the girl of her affliction!"

"For," argued Madre Marcellina shrewdly, "if he will only wait long enough, he will learn that other maids have eyes with curling lashes. As for Angela, she will be taken care of—she has sense in her head, that girl! she would not wish to ruin his life!"

But Carlo sat unmoved through her tirade. Now he got up to go. "To-morrow I shall tell Angela to make ready for the wedding," he said stubbornly.

His mouth was still set in that stubborn line when he turned into the little church to offer his petition—the same that had been on his lips each day since Angela had been left a cripple by that wretched accident. For weeks he had begged the Sacred Heart not only that she might live, but now, to all appearance, she was as well, and to Carlo's simple mind it seemed a diabolical miracle that she could not walk. As he looked into the kind bronze face above him the conviction grew that his decision was right. He would marry Angela; then, healed or not, she would always be his own. Novenas could be answered quite as well after their wedding—and how much happier they would be!

All night long the thought of it lightened his step as he went his rounds in the bank where he was watchman; all night long Angela's face peeped at him from every corner. He even caught himself whistling softly, a thing he had almost abandoned since the girl's illness. There would be something to work for now, of a certainty! Madre Marcellina should leave her two rooms and live with them, just as they had planned, save that his work would be no easier till he could earn more money. His heart leaped when the dawn began to creep up the sky, the dawn of their wedding day. How Angela's wistful face would brighten at the news! He noted the date on the big calendar, how brightly it would shine among the dark ones of her last three years—that eighteenth of April, nineteen hundred and six!

It was a little after five when he began his last round, still with the glamour of those letters in his eyes. At ten minutes past he flung open one of the windows and took a deep breath of the cool morning air. Afterward he remembered thinking what a perfect day it promised to be.

While he stood there erect the street rose suddenly in great swells, like the ocean in a gale—the buildings opposite began to sway crazily—then the floor under his feet shuddered like a living thing—and tilted upwards! Carlo swung himself over the window ledge, and ran

to the middle of the street, out of the way of falling bricks. He had seen earthquakes before. His face was white as he tried to keep his feet in the midst of that monstrous turmoil. The air was filled with sinister growls—the crash of crumbling walls—stabbed by a distant shriek. A thick, whitish-yellow dust clouded the sky—began slowly to settle—and the earth was quiet once more.

Carlo waited a few minutes longer to be sure all was over, then, mindful of his duties, he thrust his rosary back in his pocket and turned to the building. No need now of the keys in his hand! A good half of the wall lay in ruins, the remainder overhanging the walk so far it seemed a breath would dislodge it. Within, a safe leaned drunkenly to one side; the iron grating was twisted as though by a gigantic hand. The young fellow scrambled over the pile of bricks and cautiously began his interrupted round.

He dared not tell himself think of Madre Marcellina—of Angela, so helpless in her chair. The holy angels kept them! he could not leave his post. The clang of the fire gong far off in the residence district, sent a shudder through him. Ah, Angela! But if he left the bank, he whose faithfulness had been his boast—

So he plodded wearily back and forth, his face drawn with that inward struggle. Policemen hailed him, bade him seek a safer place in one of the open squares, or on a hill-top. Sometimes he had to beat back furtive-eyed creatures, who started up from the ground, rat-like, to plunder the ruined buildings. He was glad when they appeared. At least it gave him something to do. Fire broke out in everywhere now. An hour later men said that water had given out—and Carlo sent up an agonized petition to the Sacred Heart. Still he did not leave his post.

It seemed an eternity before a disheveled man appeared, in whose gaunt look Carlo recognized the bank's president. Any other time the great man would have passed him with a condescending "Good morning," but to-day he wrung the young Italian's hand. "Leone," he said, "I remember this!" he said. "There were others with him," Carlo caught the blue uniforms and heard scraps of talk about dynamite and the spreading flames as he hurried away.

What instinct guided him through the confusion he never knew. Armed men turned others back, out Carlo pushed on beneath the very muzzles of their guns. Perhaps something in the desperate young face made them give way, even against their better judgment. And so at last he reached the northwest edge of the city, where Angela had been left in the doctor's home—was it a week—or a century ago?

All about him was the havoc the earthquake had wrought. The fire was not serious as yet, but the stately houses were racked and broken out of all semblance of beauty. Often the walls were down; the rooms, their intimate life wide-open to the street, seemed to cower before the flames. Carlo went numb from head to foot when he saw the doctor's pretty home; its vines crumpled, disheveled floors afloat, doors swung wide. He had known it would be so; but for a moment he was physically sick, too sick to move. Then his strength came back with the rush of fire in his veins and he flung himself into the ruin, calling Angela wildly. Yet all the while he knew she would not answer, and when he stumbled out again, satisfied that she was not there, his face was strangely old.

He wandered aimlessly after that, back across the stricken city, where the flames were even now completing the work of destruction. He met friends and neighbors flying to safety with such goods as they could carry—strange trophies indeed, most of them bore! He heard crisp orders, the wail of a child, continued explosions and the noise of falling walls, and everywhere the scrape of trunks dragged along the sidewalks. But Angela's name ran a piteous knell in his ears and he saw only her despairing, helpless eyes.

Unconsciously he turned in the direction of the little church, the beautiful bronze head, the hand raised in benediction, of the Christ of the Sacred Heart. How desolate it looked—and how loving! Carlo's throat tightened suddenly; stinging tears filled his eyes. At the statue's feet he and Angela had knelt their first Sunday in San Francisco; there he had spent that dreadful morning when none knew whether Angela would live or die; there he had come to make his thanksgiving when they told him she would get well. The pitying face had strengthened him in joy. And how Angela had loved the Sacred Heart! He turned to the man beside him.

"Will you wait one instant, Signor long enough for me to bring out the Sacred Heart? It will be no more than a moment."

In truth it was very little more; Carlo was young and strong—and desperate. The bronze figure was

almost as tall as he, and no light burden, yet somehow he managed to free it from the debris about it and stagger back to the sidewalk with it in his arms. The watchers muttered something about a "fool Italian," but Carlo did not care. His spirits had risen unaccountably at the first glance into those pitying eyes. The Sacred Heart was kind; surely Angela was safe somewhere!

All that day he kept his treasure with him, and the wearier his arms grew with its weight, the lighter grew his heart. A hundred possibilities suggested themselves now; the doctor might have taken Angela across the bay the night before—there was a hospital over there in which she was interested, there had even been some talk of their going. Or—she had an automobile—she and Angela might be miles away from danger by this time. But most certainly she would let no harm come to Angela, whatever happened. So he comforted himself, and set out to find Madre Marcellina.

Telegraph Hill seemed the likeliest place; there where men of all nations were gathered in strange friendliness: where soft-eyed Filipinos sat side by side with swarthy Mexicans, where Italy and Hawaii jostled each other, with even an occasional Hindu or slant-eyed Chinese for neighbor. It was an orderly, quiet crowd for the most part; the majority had lost all they possessed, but they were poor people used to such accidents, and to making the best of things. They went about getting the evening meal as best they might, those who had sharing with those who had not. Some of them jested; a few of the children, recovering from their fright, were playing games.

From one group to another went Carlo, questioning till at length he found the object of his search. Madre Marcellina was squatting beside a smoldering fire making coffee in a very dirty tomato can and eating a bit of bread and sausage from equally dirty fingers. She looked up with the same disapproving eye with which she had greeted Carlo of old when he loitered on the way home.

"So?" she said, "thou art here at last! Where hast thou been all this time?" but there was an unwonted huskiness in her voice.

As dusk closed down more than one shadowy figure came to kneel before the Sacred Heart where Carlo had placed it on the ground beside him. Men blessed themselves and bowed their heads as they passed, mothers brought their little children, women crouched there and wept their hearts out, clasping the bronze feet with pleading fingers. The fire cast strange lights on the face of the Christ; His Sacred Heart seemed to catch and hold the flame, His upraised hand to rain benedictions. And few indeed there were who left His feet uncomfited.

Carlo himself knelt long before he stretched out on the ground to get what sleep he might. He could not pray, but the peace in his soul grew deeper with every glance into the bronze eyes. If he had loved that statue when it stood in the flower-decked shrine of the church, he loved it tenfold more now—it spoke eloquently of the loving kindness of the Sacred Heart. His last act was one of submission to the will of God, and so he fell asleep.

The dawn was a marvelous sight; the glittering lances of the sun driven through the lurid clouds that hung above the town; the fire beneath burning green and gold and red, a many-colored sea of flame. Those on the hilltop watched it keenly; they thought more of the problem of food for that day and of the stiffness in their bones from the night in the open.

As soon as there was light enough to see, Carlo began a systematic search for Angela. The open squares, the parks, Russian hill—wherever homeless ones had taken refuge—this new hope of his told him she might be there. Madre Marcellina went to stand in the bread line, muttering angrily about it, and repeating the roll of her wealthy Italian relatives to all who would listen.

Mid-morning found Carlo returning, weary, heavy-eyed. He had been turned back by the soldiers again and again; he had seen Death pacing through the smoke that shrouded San Francisco's broken heart; he had not found Angela. He watched the refugees dully; of what use was this struggle? Far better to die quickly, since die you must in one way or another; if not by flame then by starvation. Chicago was swept away, so they said, the ruins of Denver burning, Los Angeles wrecked. Perhaps it was the Last Judgment! Carlo crossed himself at the thought. "Sacred Heart, have mercy on us!" he whispered.

He climbed the hill with dragging feet. He would kneel once more before the statue, appeal once more to that Heart, both human and divine. But this time he would ask for peace only—and the strength to face what lay before him, be it the long, lonely years till death should call him to Angela's side, or the swifter terrors of the judgment. Unseeing, he bowed upon his breast.

Someone else had sought comfort at the poor shrine, a girl was prostrate there, her slim hands gripping the bronze feet desperately. Her long dark cloak swathed her figure in mournful folds, and over her shoulders hung two blue-black braids thick as her white wrist. And from head to foot she shook with the force of her sobbing.

Carlo started and stared. Just so Angela's hair had hung in braids—had curled about her ears!

"Angela," he gasped hoarsely, "Angela!"

The girl started up, pushing back her hair from her hot, tear-stained face. A moment she looked, belief and joy dawning through her despair, then before Carlo could go to her, she ran into his arms with an exultant cry!

"O Mio Carlo! art thou here? and safe?" Her fingers clutched him hungrily, not quite sure that he was real.

A little longer they clung to each other, whispering tender childish names, forgetful of the world. Finally Carlo held her off at arm's length in amazement. Was this the Angela he had left in a wheel chair, a helpless cripple?

"Canst thou walk, little one?" he asked.

And Angela lifting a glowing face to his. "The Sacred Heart has cured me!" she said.

It would take too long to repeat the doctor's explanation of the miracle, and neither Carlo nor Angela understood or cared one jot for it. Angela had been well long ago, it seemed, but the muscles so weak, so unused, had seemed paralyzed to the girl; she had been afraid to attempt walking and so had grown more and more helpless. And the excitement of the earthquake, her fear for Carlo, had been just the shock she needed to rouse her. For the rest, the doctor helped Carlo provide for them during the days that followed, helped him find work in the new city that presently sprang up, and was Angela's attendant at the wedding in the old Mission Dolores.

But Carlo and Angela, kneeling side by side before the bronze figure of the Sacred Heart, and teaching their way to his feet, knew that whether it was miraculous or not, their great happiness came direct from the loving Heart of Our Lord.—Lucile Kling, in Benziger's.

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAY

Strange stories are told by hospital chaplains of God's astounding mercy to poor sinners. Almost without apparent reasons, souls are saved beyond one's eyes that seemed beyond redemption. Miracles of grace are enacted that make one thrill with awe and reverence and love of the Christ becomes at times so manifest that we fall on our knees, almost frightened in presence of the supernatural.

I often visited a brother priest who was chaplain in one of the most prominent hospitals in the country. He had been there for many years and was a striking figure, as day by day he went around the various wards and private apartments, doing God's blessed work in his gentle, persuasive way. His hair was snow white, but his figure was erect and well-knit, his clerical dress faultless, and he was most impressive in his manner of offering prayers. Many a one listening to his deep sonorous voice devoutly and slowly announcing every sacred word, went away with his petitions to God stamped on their souls—a help to their future perseverance.

"One day I visited him in his apartments and he seemed preoccupied," I asked the cause.

"Well, Father Alexander," he said, "I am standing silent, as it were, before a case of God's wonderful mercy to-day."

"Downstairs a man has been bed-ridden for some months. When he came to the hospital I tried to find out what religion he professed, or if he had any at all. He would not speak a word. He seemed impatient of my presence, and even turned away his head irritably when I went near him. After innumerable attempts to awaken his interests I gave up the task, begging the Sisters who never failed to elicit some signs of gratitude or appreciation, to find out something about this silent patient. But they were unsuccessful. Even to the doctors this man barely replied in monosyllables—and soon every effort was still made for his comfort and assistance."

"Months after month passed by, but no impression was made on the poor fellow and his disease became so offensive that it was all one could do to stand for any length of time at his bedside."

"Again and again he was spoken to about his soul. He never gave an answer or made any comment no matter how impressive his visitor might be. At last only a few words, or a prayer, with an inspiration, was said by those who could not bear to see him die without one word concerning his soul or life to come."

"Six months had passed by unavailingly, so it appeared. The man seemed stolidly indifferent. Few had heard him speak."

"But this morning one of the nursing Sisters passed his room. Something impelled her to enter and say a kindly greeting. Then she asked him if he wanted anything."

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"Yes!" he said very distinctly, "May I have a drink of water?"

"Certainly," said the Sister, and she at once went in and returned with a glass of fresh water.

"He thanked her, and while she raised his head and assisted him to drink, she ventured to say as he tried to swallow a little: 'How refreshing that water seems to be to you! That is the way baptism is to the immortal soul! Of course, you have been baptized?'"

"No," said the sick man. "I have never been baptized; I don't belong to any church. If I did, I would belong to yours."

"And would you wish to be baptized a Catholic?" asked the Sister eagerly.

"If I could, I would," he replied.

"No one ever asked me."

"Why, I thought you had been spoken to repeatedly about religion," said the nun, amazed.

"I didn't understand," said he wearily.

"But you understand now," said she. "You want to be baptized so that you may reach heaven?"

"Yes, that's what I want."

"Wait a minute," said the Sister, and she quickly came to my room and amazed me by telling me No. 46 wanted to be baptized. I sprang to my feet and stole in hand went to his room."

"In an instant I saw the shadow of death on his face."

"You want to be baptized, my son?" I said. "You believe all the Holy Catholic Church teaches?"

"I want to be baptized," I do believe," came distinctly from his lips. "I seized the glass of water the Sister had brought him. It was nearly full. I poured it over his forehead, baptizing him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! As I said, 'Thanks be to God,' and turned to the Sister who was beside me with a towel in her hand, she said: 'Look, Father!'"

"I turned to the bed; the man was gasping! In one second he was dead!"

"How long ago was that?" I asked. "Less than an hour. And now, Father Alexander, can you tell me how that man received the grace of the sacrament of baptism, or how it was that the Lord's mercy lingered about him, refusing, as it were, to leave him until his soul was saved? These are the endless questions I ask myself as I minister day by day to the countless cases that come into this great hospital."

"What are the hidden causes of all these marvels?" We were both silent and at last he said:

"What wonders will be revealed at the Judgment Day! but the greatest of all will be the mercy of God."

—Richard Alexander in The Missionary.

THE DECLINE OF PROTESTANTISM

In his "Histoire des Variations des Eglises Protestantes" Bossuet quotes a homily in which St. Chrysostom says: "Novelty begets novelty, and when once one has begun to err one goes astray endlessly." It seems to me that the present condition of Protestantism illustrates the remark.

Its leading men have been so eager each to bring forward something about which they have left Protestant Christianity without any ground-work.

Take up any paper which gives a general record of religious events and you will be sure to discover in it two phenomena. On the one hand, you will find indications that Protestantism, at least so far as church attendance and other outward observances are concerned, is falling away, and, on the other hand, you will read utterances of Protestant ministers in which tenets that were regarded by the founders of Protestantism as essentially necessary to its preservation, are rejected and new views discountenancing any definite standard of belief are expressed.

In the Daily News and Leader, published recently, these are conspicuous features. Under the heading "Fewer Church-goers in Liverpool," are given the results of a Sunday church attendance census taken by the "Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury." The figures do grave injustice to the Catholics, for account is taken only of the attendance at 11 o'clock Mass, whereas, as every Catholic knows, in a great city such as Liverpool, where there are many Masses at the churches on Sunday morning, in order to get anything near an accurate idea of the number present at the Sunday morning services the 11 o'clock figures would have to be multiplied. But even as they stand the figures show a Catholic increase. The aggregate attendance, morning and evening, at the Catholic churches in 1902 was 35,330; now it is 38,262. Protestants of all denominations have not only not kept pace with the growth of the population, but the attendance is considerably lower than it was ten years ago. The Anglican attendance numbered 67,898 in 1902, and only 57,932 when the census was taken on Sunday, December 8. Of the Nonconformists 66,712 attended service in 1902, but not more than 52,462 go to church now.

What are the causes of the falling away among the Protestants? One of them surely is doctrinal variation, a variation which just at present is dissociating itself from the past of Protestantism and verging towards the theory that it does not matter what you believe if you only believe something. In the same issue of the Daily News and Leader there is given an interview with the Rev. Dr. Munro

Gibson, who has been for thirty years a Presbyterian minister of a London church, and in it he is reported to have said: "We go to the Bible for a vision of the human soul in its aspiration towards God—its aspiration towards God and its inspiration from God. Now you cannot represent that by dogmas. We have got away from that. You must express it in terms of human life, in pictures of actual human experience. The new message is not God in a Book, but God in the men that wrote the Book—not God in a dogma, but God in human experience." This sounds like the Catholic doctrine that in order to get the true meaning of the Bible you must have recourse to a safe interpreter. But to whom does Dr. Munro Gibson point as a safe interpreter? Beyond speaking of human experience, he leaves you without guide or compass.

By whose experience is the Protestant to be led? Is he to evolve his doctrines from his own experience or to accept them as suggested by the experience of the gentlemen in the pulpits? In either case what safeguard is there for the maintenance of essential Christian doctrine, for men's own experience varies with the lapse of time, and ministers' experiences differ, and if there is authority neither in the Church nor in the Bible to keep people right, what is to prevent them from mixing up Paganism with Christianity or wandering entirely into Paganism?

Anglican clergymen are not less notable than Presbyterians for advocating a Christianity that practically bids men to nothing definite. Dr. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's, is reported by the Morning Post to have said recently on the occasion of the delivery of the annual Jowett Lecture at the Passmore Edwards Settlement by Canon Rashdall: "We really could not identify the Church of God with any particular institution or organization. It was antecedently very improbable that God should have chosen to do His most important work by means of a system of privilege and monopoly. That system worked badly in human affairs, and there was no evidence that the Church which He had founded was intended to be worked in that way."

It became increasingly absurd to attach enormous importance to such mechanical divisions as the peculiar method of the devolution of the ministry of the verbal expression of various articles of faith. This language is not unlike that of the Persian Prophet, "Abdul Baha, who had come to Europe to proclaim that 'the differences which exist among religions to-day have their origin in blind imitation and dogma.' When it is heard so frequently among the Protestants of this country who can wonder that the ministers are losing hold of their congregations and that the people are lapsing into complete indifference?"

The prospect created by this state of things must cause uneasiness to every sincere Christian. England is rapidly drifting away from Protestant Christianity. Has Protestantism got in it the capacity to bring it back? I think all who have studied the subject must say it has not. The drifting of the people is due in no small measure to the drifting of the clergy, and such being the mental condition of the ministers, how is it to be expected that they will inspire their flocks with enthusiasm for doctrines about which they themselves feel no earnest emotion? If the Protestant churches fail to bring back the

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multitudes in this country who are Christians merely in name, what will happen? That is a question for most anxious thought. To Catholics the reflection must occur that the opportunity offered to the Catholic Church entails upon them responsibilities of which they should endeavor to avail themselves to the fullest extent.—L. K. in Catholic Times.

A thing very pleasing to Our Lord and profitable to the soul is to offer Him our heart with much affection, that He may dwell therein, and then to have a treasure of good works to present to Him; for the Jews after receiving Him with great pomp, let Him leave their city without giving Him to eat.

You will have to work and maybe fight. What is called good fortune isn't set before you on a silver platter. It is caught, cleaned, cooked and served by you, and it is served to yourself. Not that others cannot share it. By no means. The only right reason for working or fighting for it is to help others. Good fortune eaten alone is twenty times as bitter as sulphate of quinine in its flaky state, without a coating. But the great thing to remember about good fortune is this,—that you yourself are it!—Leigh Mitchell Huges.

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