

THE BETTER PART.

BY E. M. SMITH, IN THE "SACRED HEART REVIEW."

According to the popular proverb Jack Gifford had undoubtedly been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. The old saying will soon become obsolete, not being sufficiently comprehensive for these days of sybaritic luxury, when, among the wealthier classes, the advent of a baby is accompanied more nearly by a chest of silver than a single spoon, and Jack while yet a pink sprawling morsel of four weeks could have counted by scores the varied tokens of affection that were showered upon him by admiring friends and proud relatives. Until his advent there had been no direct heir to the vast Gifford fortune. Hence his birth was hailed with unalloyed joy by his parents, and with properly simulated gladness by the more distant branches of the house of Gifford whom the unconscious infant had cut off from a neat little inheritance, but who were hush-minded enough to hold him entirely innocent and irresponsible for their natural disappointment. All this by way of showing that he entered the world under the pleasantest and most auspicious circumstances and as time went on his lucky star continued to remain above the horizon.

Even the ill that childhood's flesh is peculiarly heir to passed him by; measles swept the neighborhood but Jack failed to "catch" them; in like manner he proved himself an immune from whooping cough and mumps and later on escaped the horrors of scarlet fever. In this latter case, however, there was nothing remarkable, for at the first warning of this dread disease his mother promptly closed her house—it was just a week before Christmas—and carried her son, a most unwilling refugee, to Florida, where they remained until all possibility of contagion was over. Jack heartily resented this precaution, for, boy-like he rather envied his companions the distinction their broader experience gave, and he quite agreed with the old family doctor who pooh-poohed such an extreme course as useless and unnecessary. "Better stay at home and let your boy take things as they come," he growled. "Children's diseases are all the better if the child gets them when he is young. They are bound to come some time, and like love, the sooner had the sooner over. Sickness, in one form or other is part of a child's heritage." But Mrs. Gifford, while admitting the force of this argument from a physician's standpoint, failed to be convinced. Her Jack was far too precious a possession to endanger by the risks that parents of ordinary children are obliged to take; she was almost humble in her maternal pride, thinking herself all unworthy of the gift of such a son!

One would naturally imagine that brought up in such an atmosphere, Jack Gifford would develop into an unbearable little prig, but it was not the least part of the boy's good fortune that he had been endowed with a disposition so sweet that no amount of indulgence appeared to affect it. Generous, affectionate, and tender-hearted, he was the idol of all who knew him. We frequently hear of children who are incapable of being spoiled—it is true they are so rare that many of us are excusably led to believe them extinct along with the dodo, the ichthyosaurus and other species of antediluvian creation. It really seemed that Jack belonged to this favored class, for he passed from petted babyhood to caressed, indulged boyhood, and starting to school at the age of eight, he verified his friends' partiality by becoming the most popular boy in the younger set. A child's first year at school, a boy's more especially, is apt to be a good foretaste of his success or failure in after life; and Jack, though not remarkably gifted in a mental way, entered into his studies with the same zest and heartiness that he showed in play, and earned the approbation of his teachers, and among his classmates, the still more coveted reputation of being "an all-round good fellow."

Mr. John Gifford, to whom Jack's birth had given the proud opportunity of adding senior to his firm but irregular signature, was a wealthy banker in London, a flourishing town not so very far from New York. He had married late in life and the first child, a little daughter, lived only ten months; long enough, however, to leave a painful void in the hearts of both father and mother. All their hopes and ambitions were now centered upon this son, who was born seven years later. When we pause to consider the frailty and uncertainty of life, nothing is more pathetic to witness than the affection and pride which parents lavish upon an only child. Gifford Senior was regarded as a stern, uncompromising man by those with whom he had business relations, but like most stern characters, he was absolutely just and impartial, and, in consequence, he commanded the respect if not the love of all his employees. On the whole, he was popular without catering in the slightest degree either to the likes or dislikes of the public. His sole idea of enjoyment was in the acquisition of money and, being a typical American father, in the disbursement of the same for his family's benefit.

Many a dollar leaked through his fingers in this process and went to lighten the burdens of others, for Mr. Gifford was a charitable man in his way without the world's suspecting it. With him charity began at home; what was left over and above was ungrudgingly given to the poor, but he never stinted himself, and if his native city wanted a hospital donation of five hundred, and Mr. Gifford happened to want a horse at the same time costing just that amount, the horse-trainer would be very apt to get the check. "Why not?" he would argue, "I have worked hard all my life to accumu-

late a fortune and I propose to enjoy it while I am here. Time enough for legacies and donations when I am gone. No sir, I won't put my name down for a cent," and he would not, but as a sop to that three-headed monster, Conscience, he would perhaps give more than the sum requested in private and unobtrusive charities. Whenever Gifford Senior refused to assist or endow a public benefaction the poor of London were likely to enjoy a cheerful and comfortable winter, so hard is it for us to truly judge our neighbor.

When the time drew near for Jack to go to college, long and earnest debates took place between his parents as to which institution of learning should be entrusted with his education. Like many of the most important steps in life, it was finally decided by accident. Strange, is it not, that those events to which we have so long looked forward, those grand coups so carefully planned, are so often withdrawn from our disposition when the moment of fulfillment arrives, and utterly changed by the hand of Destiny? We may live to bless the trivial circumstance that has determined our career, or to rail against the cruel fate that altered it from the thing we had so confidently planned; but call it by what name we will, we are forced to acknowledge that there is a "Divinity that shapes our ends," taking the child from our puerile hands and giving a sharp blow there, a chastened touch here, so that at last our lives may be sculptured after the model set for us centuries ago by the humble Teacher of Galilee.

Mr. Gifford had almost decided to confer upon Princeton the honor of being his son's Alma Mater, when a chance encounter with a couple of perfect strangers caused him to reconsider the matter. He and Jack were making what had become to them an annual pilgrimage up the beautiful Hudson. It was a hot day in August and they had few fellow-passengers; among the number, however, were two priests whose enjoyment of the scenery was so keen that they attracted Gifford Senior's attention, and he blandly began to point out to them the different objects of interest along the river. They were men of wide experience and high culture, as Mr. Gifford was not slow to discover. Their conversation was both interesting and instructive and the intensity of eagerness with which Jack hung upon their words amused while it pleased his father, whose acquaintance with the clergy of any denomination had been extremely limited, and this was the first time he had ever had any conversation with a Catholic priest. He was not a bigoted man, but he had heretofore imagined that Romanists "belonged to a somewhat inferior order of beings—well-meaning enough but rather illiterate, not needing the reader infer from this statement that Mr. Gifford is alone in holding these peculiar views. In neighborhoods where Catholics are few there are many apparently educated people who would unhesitatingly endorse them. Fathers Carroll and Seigel had been abroad fifteen years and were now taking advantage of their short vacation to revisit some old scenes; they were going to Niagara by way of Albany, and Mr. Gifford was so charmed with his new friends that he readily yielded to Jack's entreaties to extend their outing over the same route. Before the falls were reached he mentally determined that the college which had trained these men was the place best suited to his son's necessities, and the following month Gifford Junior was happily settled in a Catholic College, where he remained four years.

It would be natural to suppose that during his college course Jack should become a convert to Catholicity, but not so; he was deeply impressed by the beauty and solemnity of the Roman Ritual, and also by the constant examples of holiness and spirituality in the lives of his teachers, but in spite of all this he never entered the boy's mind. The fire of Divine Grace failed to touch his heart and he left school at the age of nineteen as indifferent to the affairs of the soul as when he entered. This was not to be marvelled at, for religion had never played a prominent part in Jack Gifford's home life. His mother after teaching him to kiss the Our Father and "Now I lay me," looked upon her duties in that line as properly discharged, and Jack evinced no disposition for Sunday schools. As he grew older he accompanied his mother to church when he felt like it. Mrs. Gifford was not herself a devout member of the fashionable congregation in whose stately edifice she held a front pew; it is a peculiarity among many of our dissenting brethren to attend divine

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children are sick children. Their inactivity and sober faces are not in keeping with robust childhood. They lack vitality and resistive power, and are very susceptible to colds and contagious diseases.

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service only, when a fine orator is advertised to fill the pulpit or when they personally like their minister, and on ordinary occasions Mrs. Gifford considered the Sabbath properly observed if she read two chapters of the Bible. On fine days when she felt perfectly well, but not in a church-going mood, she stilled the voice of conscience by reading three, and if the weather was at all bad she omitted their perusal altogether, for in this case, she argued, she would not have gone to church anyway. Withal she was a devoted mother and conscientious wife, although it is not surprising that her son and husband placed little stress upon religion, regarding it as a merely social duty to be waived or observed as best suited their convenience.

After two years of foreign travel, Jack entered his father's bank and settled down to business. Here, as in every other avenue his feet had trod, he found the way made smooth. Fortune continued to smile upon her favorite. While abroad he felt desperately in love with a charming girl, a Miss Habberton of New York; their affection was mutual—as they say in story books—and shortly after his return home they were married with copious parental blessings and an extraordinary amount of good wishes from their hosts of friends. Then a new world opened to our hero. For the first time in his twenty-four years of careless existence, he experienced the sensation of responsibility, welcome only when it is thrust upon us by those whom we devotedly love.

Lillias Habberton could be classed among these sweet, innocent girls whose personality seems such a direct revelation of infinite purity and love, that their mere presence suffices to elevate all who come in contact with them to a higher, holier atmosphere. She was not beautiful and yet—"you turned from the fairest to look in her face." There are such women even in these days when clinics and dissecting-rooms are filled with soft-eyed maidens so intent upon proving their opportunity over man that no field is sacred from their invasion.

A happy year of married life followed: twelve wonderful, love-lit months such as come to few in a lifetime, but which show us in one dazzling glance what existence without adversity might mean, and then Lillias Gifford died. She did not want to go. For one whose soul had probably never been stained with a deliberate sin, she was terribly afraid. Poor, young wife! It was pitiful to witness the tenacity with which she clung to life, begging the doctors and her husband to save her; but alas, of what avail is human skill against the unchangeable decrees of God?

In deepest misery Jack knelt beside his bed, stunned by that absolute despair which comes to us with our first great sorrow. Fate had been cruel, inasmuch as she had allowed him no chastening preparation, no warning of the bitterness in store for him and oh, the awful dread, the consuming, maddening agony of love that possesses us in such an hour! The horror of each moment that approached, the passionate yearning over the moments that are gone! When the last sad rites were over few would have recognized the genial, kind-hearted Jack Gifford, whose ready smile and ready coin carried comfort to every struggling soul he met with on his daily rounds in the haggard, grief-worn man who was sitting alone in a Pullman compartment, speeding over the Western prairies in the futile hope of getting away from his troubles. Travel is the only possible lethe in such a case, travel and work, and to Jack the latter was still an unknown quantity.

The three years that ensued were dark with sorrow; no gleam of resignation shed its beneficent light over their weary round as Gifford roamed restlessly to and fro among nature's wild, untrammelled paths—a wanderer on the face of the earth. He could not turn to God for consolation; God and he were strangers! He had not learned how to say, "Thy will be done." Nor could he understand why one so pure and devoted as his Lillias should have so feared to die. She had always found such comfort in church-going. Why was it? He scoffed at the cruelty of a creed that could support one during life and then fail him in his supreme hour of need.

This thought haunted him more than all others; he pondered over it at night as he lay in his tent gazing up at the limitless expanse of sky, where millions of starry worlds seemed to mock him with their mysterious creation; during the day it accompanied him in his wanderings among the wild gorges and canyons of the Rockies, or over the burning trails of la Jornada del Muerte. At length, all unsought, the answer came. He was spending the winter in a small village or pueblo of Mexico, where the bracing climate and ever-shining sun buoyed him up unconsciously. In a half-cynical way it amused and diverted him to go among the poor Mexicans, who comprised four-fifths of the population, doing good. He would not acknowledge, even himself, the comfort of it, for his heart was still filled with bitterness. He realized that all hope of happiness had died out of his life forever. His was a nature that could admit no second love. His first sincere, boyish passion could never be rekindled for the reason that there was nothing left to feed the flames; but while in Torreon he formed a sincere attachment for a youth, Felipe Perez, by name, who had acted as his guide in various hunting expeditions and had once recklessly endangered his life to save Gifford from the furious onslaught of a wounded boar.

He was a handsome boy of seventeen or thereabouts, with soft olive skin and the dark, lustrous eyes that every Mexican, no matter how lowly, has as part of his inheritance from old Spain.

Felipe and his mother were a happy illustration of the Biblical story, for he was an old child and she was a widow. There is no explaining the laws of mutual attraction, and

Jack Gifford found more pleasure and more comfort in the society of this joyous, illiterate child of nature than had come to him since his wife's death; as for Felipe, he loved his American friend with all the intensity of his impetuous, southern heart, and such devotion is of the kind that Jonathan gave David; or Damon, Pythias—such kind as outlasts the centuries.

He was by no means a stupid companion, for he had been educated in the school of nature; one is invariably nobler and better for such learning, and he was well taught by his pious, old mother in all that pertained to his religion. Indeed, Mr. Gifford was learning many things of his pequeno amigo, as he called Felipe, among them faith and trust in God; for the boy's unconscious example was having a most beneficial effect upon the big, good-natured traveller. But their companionship was doomed to an abrupt end. The long-lost silver mines around Torreon were at last re-opened, and Felipe, who was a miner by occupation, made a reluctant adios to the dolce far niente existence he had been leading and accepted a position in the "Golden Giant." Three dollars a day is too high a wage to be idly refused, and the boy was his mother's sole support. She was, however, strongly opposed to his working in this line; there had been talk among the miners some weeks before it opened, of danger in the east tunnel from the large timbers that had rotted while the mine was in disuse. Many of the men were not satisfied with the cursory examination and slight repairs that had been made, and refused to take the risk of working there.

Others scouted the idea of the beams, falling and Felipe, with that boyish craving for a danger that is possible but not probable, was among the latter number. Thus it came about that he left his mother one glorious autumn day when the world seemed at its brightest, with his customary kiss and cheery adios, and a few hours later, was brought back to her a crushed and bleeding mass. The culpable neglect of a rich corporation cost the lives of six brave men that day.

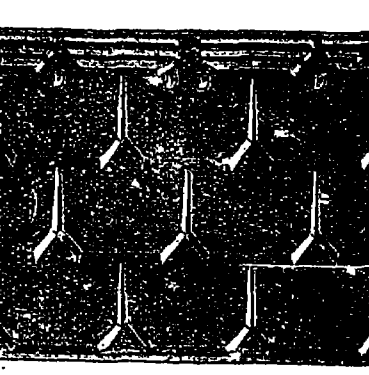
Gifford sat in silence by the stricken widow watching while the fresh young life of his little friend ebbed away; there was no one else in the room except the good Padre who had hastened to hear poor Felipe's confession and administer the last sacraments of the Church. Presently the boy opened his beautiful eyes and recognized Gifford; he tried to stretch a poor, mangled hand towards him, but the effort was too much. Jack fell on his knees beside the humble cot, "Oh my boy," he cried, "it is cruel, cruel for you to be taken off like this! How can a merciful God permit such things to happen?" "Hush, Señor," whispered Felipe reverently, "we must not question the good Father. I am very willing to die. I used to think it would be hard to leave this beautiful world, but the pain is so bad that now I am glad to go. My only sorrow is for my mother; she has no one to care for her. Will you do so, Señor, for my sake? Promise me and I shall die content."

"Indeed I will, Felipe; she shall be my sacred charge and may the Lord deal by my own mother as I do by yours." "Ay de mi, muchacho, do not think of me in this awful hour, soul of my own!" sobbed the poor Señor, in her childishly broken English. "Our Heavenly Father will watch over me even as I am here." With a long-drawn sigh of mingled pain and satisfaction Felipe closed his eyes; the powerful rays of the late September sun streamed through the one small window of their low-roofed abode, lighting up its rough walls bare of ornament, and revealing each weak spot in the much worn Navajo rug; they scintillated back and forth from the little brass crucifix that hung below a gaudy picture of Mexico's patron saint, "Our Lady of Guadalupe," which was framed in a circle of impossible paper roses, the whole enclosed in a glass-covered frame, and finally pierced further into the room, hovering like some bright-winged angel over the spot where the boy lay. Outside, the King of Day was disappearing in a last burst of glory behind the silent majestic mountains; and with his setting death entered the lowly Mexican cottage, not in terror but with a beaming smile, and led Felipe's spirit soul beyond the far blue hills that bound his small world into the mystic realms of everlasting life.

Within, the mother tried to smile

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her sobs as she clung to her son's still form, and the tall American Senator knelt at the Padre's feet begging to be taken into the Church. All his doubts were swept away and a flood of grace poured its saving waters into his tempest tossed soul. He did not require much instruction, being already familiar with the teachings of the Catholic faith, and shortly after young Perez's untimely death John Gifford was baptized and made his first Communion in the tiny brown church which was perched like a sparrow on the hill top, and which could claim nothing in the way of beauty except the simple faith of its humble congregation. Then, with the dawn of a great peace in his heart, he said good-bye to Torreon and went back to his father's palatial home; but before leaving he settled upon the Señor Perez an income from which she was to draw at pleasure, a gift that seemed precisely to the poor woman who had never before had as much as twenty-five pesos in her possession at one time. At first she was very reluctant to accept such a present, whatever tourists may say to the contrary, but Jack used his most persuasive endeavors and finally conquered by telling her it was for the sake of the affection he had borne her boy.

Gifford Junior did not re-enter his father's bank upon returning to London, nor did he remain long in his native town, where the announcement that he had joined the Roman Church was received with incredulity by his numerous acquaintances. Their surprise soon merged into disgust when they learned he had again left home, this time to study for the priesthood. But Jack had long outgrown all regard for the barometrical changes of public opinion; his only regret lay in the anticipated displeasure of his parents and his surprise was unbounded when he discovered that Gifford Senior rather approved the step. Mrs. Gifford acquiesced from sheer force of habit.

To-day Father Gifford ranks among the most eloquent of our missionary priests; his yearly converts may be counted by dozens, for he has learned by personal suffering the way to the hearts of his fellow-men. Grief, truth and love go far towards making the perfect priest as they do the perfect poet, and all of these our friend had known in his youth. For it is—

"Thus by ways not understood Out of each dark vicissitude He bringeth compensating good."

After a cold drive a teaspoonful of Pain-killer mixed with a glass of hot water and sugar will be found a better stimulant than whiskey. Avoid substitutes; there is but one Pain-Killer, Perry-Davis', 25 cents and 50 cents.

STATISTICS OF AMERICAN CHURCHES.

The New York Independent for this week contains its usual annual statistics of the American Churches, from which it appears that in 1899 the number of ministers was 133,901, of churches 187,803, and of members 27,710,004, says the New York Sun. According to this table the membership increased during the year about 1 per cent., the increase in the number of ministers was nearly 3 per cent., and the number of churches stood almost still, increasing only 421 out of a total of 187,803. Such a large disproportionate increase in ministers may be taken as an explanation of the cause of the present complaint of an over-supply of ministers, in some of the denominations, and the consequent suffering among them.

The increase of 1 per cent. only in the membership does not indicate vigorous growth, but the circumstance that nearly twenty-eight millions of the American people are affiliated with churches suggests that the assaults on the foundations of religion from within the Church itself have not yet seriously disturbed the hearty or nominal popular allegiance to it. More than nineteen-twentieths of this great total, too, is made up of Christian believers, for the Independent's table includes only 1,043,800 Jews, and the aggregate membership of the infidel societies is very small.

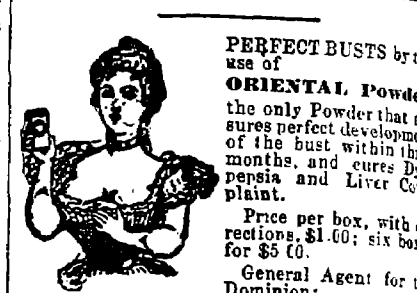
The Christian Churches with a membership exceeding half a million are those:

	Minist.	Churches.	Members.
Roman Catholic	11,144	11,594	8,446,306
Methodists	36,424	63,023	5,809,511
Baptists	33,088	49,231	4,443,058
Lutherans	6,885	10,991	1,573,770
Presbyterians	12,073	14,831	1,560,848
Disciples of Christ	6,339	10,208	1,118,397
Episcopalians	4,981	6,623	701,326
Congregationalists	5,039	5,620	628,235
Reformed	1,897	2,440	305,074
United Brethren	2,529	4,965	264,985

The Catholic Citizen says: Hoffmann's Catholic Directory for 1900 will show a Catholic population of over 10,000,000.

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10:30 a.m.	1:20 p.m.	10:15 a.m.	1:20 p.m.
12:00 p.m.	2:20 p.m.	11:45 a.m.	2:20 p.m.
1:30 p.m.	3:20 p.m.	1:15 p.m.	3:20 p.m.
3:00 p.m.	4:20 p.m.	3:45 p.m.	4:20 p.m.
4:30 p.m.	5:20 p.m.	5:15 p.m.	5:20 p.m.
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