

# Bert's Tenth Sale

His face was half freckles and generally, too, half dirt. In spite of this, however, if by some curious arithmetic you were to put everything together, you would find in that youth of thirteen years a face all sincerity and candor and simple honesty. Life is a glorious thing to some, but to poor Bert Tibbs life shaped itself into one continuous penance—and this, too, without his ever once suspecting it. He had in him the rare real stuff which citizens and soldiers are made of—a gameness of nature which prevented him from murmuring and a cheeriness of disposition which could put up placidly with such plebeian ills as cold and hunger and the lack of household comforts. If he had lived in the days which Plutarch chronicles Bert would have belonged to the Laolios or the Spartans. As it was, he grew up amid the obscurity of modern times, and his lonely home was set up by the waterside in the City of Churches.

Bert's mother had died long before he was old enough to realize the full meaning of such a loss. Ever since that bereaving event the Tibbs family of three members had dragged along in the squalor and darkness of Lower Emmett street. An elder sister, Maggie, who was but sixteen herself, kept house for them in a nominal sort of a way. At least she made the beds and swept out the rooms and managed the cooking, which latter was indeed very elementary. The other member of the family group was Bert's father, Waldo Tibbs, a man of extraordinary ability, who never had any regular avocation or employment, but took odd, straggling jobs, sometimes laboring as a doc's hand and at other times serving in a non-descript capacity as spur hand at the electric car barns. The history of that father could be set up in two ominous words, he drank.

Occasionally Maggie used to work at making artificial flowers, and in the engrossment of this occupation she had picked up acquaintance with a young co-worker named Helen Waters, whose home was out in suburban Flatbush. The two became firm friends, and Helen, pitying the other's more straitened lot, often implored Maggie Tibbs to come out and spend a week at Flatbush. She promised, moreover, to render that sojourn an extremely pleasant one.

At length the opportunity presented itself, or at least Maggie so decided. Her father had just entered upon the riotous festivities of a characteristic spree, and Maggie Tibbs quietly reasoned that during the indefinite period of his carousal there would be no special need of any housekeeping. Bert, being of no account, could take care of himself, he was not old enough to be helpless, like her father.

"I'll leave you seventy-five cents, Bert," she said, "do you think that'll be enough?"

"Oh, sure, Maggie, that'll do, fifty'll do!"

"I'll make it seventy-five," she said, generously; "that'll not be too much for a whole week. You won't have to buy much of anything, you know, and then, too, things are so much nicer when they're cooked fresh."

"Don't mind me; I'll get along."

"Always grease the pan well before you fry anything, Bert. Don't forget that."

"I think I'll buy sausages every day."

"Do they're the easiest thing in the world to cook—and Mr. Maloney has such lovely ones, and he always gives you honest measure. Burkhardt doesn't; he'll skin you, Bert, every time, if you don't watch him putting them on the scales. Now, don't grease the pan too much, there's a hot of grease anyway, in sausages, you know. If it happens to come home before I get back, you can get him some eggs."

"All right."

"And there are two different kinds, you know, there's the barrelled eggs and the farmer's eggs. Be sure and ask Maloney for the barrelled eggs, because you can get more of 'em for the same money; and you know that when dad comes home and gets all sobered he's terribly hungry and he eats a whole lot. You can tell dad that I've gone out to stay with Helen for a few days."

"If he comes home, I will."

"And you won't be very lonesome yourself, will you, Bert?"

"No, I never get lonesome. But say—why don't you put on your mits, Maggie? Hain't you got any? Want mine? I'll bet you take 'em."

"What, wear boys' gloves the idea!" and she laughed the notion away in pretty scorn. "I've got my own gloves, Bert," she added, "but I'm not going to wear 'em."

"Your hands will be awful cold."

"No matter about that. You see, Bert, my gloves are kinder soiled, and one of the fingers has a hole in the end of it. I wouldn't want to have Helen notice it. I wish you could only see Helen's beautiful gloves for once, drab kid, with a black silk threading."

"Must have cost lots of money."

"Sights of it, I suppose, but, then, they are folks who can well afford it. Helen's father is a floor-walker, you see, and everybody else works for him."

"Is he their boss?"

"Well, it's just like a boss; he doesn't have a thing to do himself except to walk around in a carpet store and see that everyone else is working."

"He must be awful rich!" sighed Bert.

"Well, Helen says he isn't, but she says, too, that he isn't poor, either, whatever she means by that. Now, good-bye, don't get one bit lonesome, will you, till I come back?"

"No, I won't, good-bye!" and she bent over and kissed him tenderly and was gone.

The night approached, a cold, bitter, wintry night, with shrieking wind and occasionally a flurry of gust of early snow. Bert, despite his promise of immunity, felt melancholy enough as he lay there through the long dark hours on his bed in those dingy quarters and listened to the rage of the outer elements. He awoke early, very early, but only to find his squalid room of an icy temperature. A shingle which had served in lieu of a window pane was blown in by the strong night winds, and through the yawning aperture the cold outer currents penetrated with malignant vehemence.

Bert rose and started a fire in the kitchen stove, but somehow nothing seemed to work right, dampers and draft brought only puzzling results, and the smoke reeled back from the chimney into the room in a way that made the youngster apprehensive. It was no use trying. He gave up the task and contented himself with a cold breakfast of bread and milk. Then, as if impelled by some instinctive wish to overcome the depressing loneliness of those silent rooms, he pulled on his winter jacket and darted out aimlessly into the bitter atmosphere.

A tide of hurrying people up the street made Bert dimly conscious of the fact that it was Sunday morning, and that already many good Christians folks were on their way to the morning service. There was no thought of church-going in Bert's own mind, and yet he trudged on along with the others.

When he reached the porch of St. Peter's Church, the temple whither the throngs were tending, he halted sort and watched the others as they went hurrying in through the huge doorway. His little white teeth chattered with the cold and his hands, though buried in the pockets of his trousers, were by no means comfortable.

"Come, sonny," suddenly resounded a voice close beside him, "don't stand there freezing in the cold; get inside where you belong!"

"You ain't a cop!" answered Bert, looking strangely toward the speaker.

"No, I know I ain't a cop," answered the man, "but I'm the next thing to a cop I'm the sexton, and my word goes around here just the same as a cop's, so you get inside. It's almost time for Mass to begin, anyway."

Bert felt that there was some great mistake, but he stepped in as the stranger had bidden him. It was such a relief from the hard, crisp morning air! The smell of the steam heat was delightful, and yet Bert felt that it was not right for him to enjoy it; he seemed to regard himself almost as a pillar, and still he wondered

that no one detected him and ordered him to leave.

"Go up and sit with the children, my boy," said another kindly voice near him, and Bert sauntered up the aisle, his heart all a-throb with nervousness. No one else took the slightest notice of him. He sat down in a pew with several other youngsters, casting curious eyes himself around the big edifice, glancing up at the statues along the high walls, at the many pictures, too, that hung there and at the towering altar, with its candles and candelabra all ablaze. Everything was new and splendid and theatrical to Bert, and as no one came to turn him out he quietly determined that he would stay and see everything through to the end. He was happy to be in the companionship of so many silent, unmolested people, and the coziness of the place made him think he was getting the richest of luxuries for nothing.

The service began and Bert watched it eagerly, marveling what it all could mean. He listened with rapt ears to the choir, he drank in the words of the priest's instruction, and when all was over Bert lingered in the seat after the rest, wondering quietly what next would occur and speculating as to whether any one would come and turn him out.

A man robed in a long, black, trailing robe, such as Bert had never seen before, bent down to the laity.

"Well, my little man, which class are you in?"

"I dunno."

"Stranger here, are you?"

"Yessir."

"Where do you live?"

"Down Emmett street."

"Well, that's in this parish all right. What catechism are you in?"

"Dunno."

"Have you learned all your prayers so as to say them perfectly?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you'd better start in and learn them before we send you higher, don't you think so?"

"I dunno."

"Well, I think you had come, I'll put you in the proper seat. Here, take this catechism, by the way. You be here every Sunday without fail hereafter—understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, you won't forget it, will you?"

"No, sir."

Bert was as good as his promise, and so on every Sunday morning he returned to St. Peter's Church, where he renewed the transports of the first morning. He was a quick learner, and seemed, indeed, such a conscientious lad that the teacher pushed him rapidly ahead, and so it turned out that before the year's end Bert was ranged among the children of the first Communion class. It was only then that he suddenly realized things in all their full momentousness.

"Father Halpin," he said one day to the priest in charge, "I don't think I can go to confession, can I?"

"Certainly, my child; why not?"

"I ain't no Catholic."

"No Catholic; why of course you are, and a mighty good little one at that. You ever miss Mass or Sunday school, do you?"

"Oh, no, I always come because you know I said I would."

"And what makes you think you're not a Catholic?"

"'Coz my folks ain't Catholics, and I know I ain't never been baptized. I wish I could be, though. I wish you could make me one, Father Halpin."

"God bless your dear little heart, my child; of course I will. But there must be some kind of a story to all this. Come and sit down in here in the vestry with me and tell me everything. Never baptized, eh? Well, that's the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"Ever afterwards Father Halpin called Bert his little convert and was very proud of the youngster, making him an honored errand boy and then, too, a favored pupil at the parish school. The only circumstance that grieved the priest was to see poor Bert's young countenance grow whiter and thinner from day to day.

A few years rolled by into Time's illimitable gulf.

It was just at the close of the memorable mission given in St. Peter's Church by a missionary father of great fame, who had come from the Passionist monastery of Hoboken and had spoken night after night for two successive weeks. His sermons were preached with immense effect, and it seemed as if all Brooklyn crowded in to listen.

One of the topics which the venerable man touched earnestly upon in his nightly sermons was the importance of possessing good religious books in every household. He spoke with particular favor of the chief d'oeuvre of Cardinal Gibbons, entitled "The Faith of Our Fathers," and, indeed, recommended it as a literary necessity for every home in the parish.

The demand therefore grew up at once, and Father Halpin, wishing to accommodate the appeal, sent out an order immediately for two hundred copies of the celebrated work. By some accident of expressage, however, the consignment did not put in its appearance until the days of the mission had entirely elapsed, and then the problem of how to get rid of the books.

"Why don't you let us boys try and sell some of them for you, father?" said Bert Tibbs to the priest one day.

"Well, that an idea, sure enough," answered the clergyman, "a couple of dozen of you good, energetic youngsters might take them off my hands, suppose I give you nine or ten apiece."

"Very well."

So the youthful agents started out on their travels, Bert Tibbs the happiest and proudest of the little band.

After a few days Bert returned to the rectory to make his report. He had sold nine copies without the least trouble, but, do what he might, it seemed as if he never could dispose of the tenth. He gave it back in despair to Father Halpin.

Next day Bert rang again at the rectory bell.

"I want that other book again, Father Halpin," he said, "I think that I know a woman who will buy it."

"Good! Here it is. Who is your this time?"

"Mrs. Burdock, the lady who lives up on the corner in the big brown house."

"Mrs. Burdock—I know her well—that is, I know all about her."

"Well, I think I can sell her that book."

"Oh, no, Bert, my boy, you won't sell that lady a copy of the work. How came you to think of her?"

"I had to bring a message up to her this morning, and then I had to wait until she wrote the answer. She made me sit down in a big room that was completely filled with books, books on the tables, books piled along the walls, books everywhere."

"Yes, her library, I suppose."

"Well, I never saw so many books in my life, and she caught me looking around at them. She says to me: 'Interested in my books?' I says, 'Yes, ma'am, where did you get 'em all?' She laughed kinder, and then she said: 'Why, I imagine I must have bought them all.' Then I said: 'Well, I used to sell books once myself, I sold nine.'"

"Go on, Bert; you are interesting."

"Well, she said, 'I'm sorry I didn't know it, or I'd have purchased one of you.'"

"And so you think from that little remark that she'd buy this remaining volume, do you?"

"Yes, because since I left her house I spoke with some other people about her, and they tell me that she buys everything that comes along. A boy down in Henry street sold her eight quarts of blackberries once, and a man over in Atlantic avenue sold her a big clock."

"Yes," laughed Father Halpin, "that may all be very true, but did you know, Bert, that Mrs. Burdock is the woman who runs all those Gospel mee'ings over here behind our convent school? Did you know that she is leagued in everything with those who wage war against the Catholic Church?"

"No, I didn't know that, father."

"Well, she is. This book, you know, Bert, is written by a priest—by more than a priest, by a Cardinal—and it treats entirely of our Church. It's a Catholic book, you see. Mrs. Burdock wouldn't have much use for a Catholic book."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I saw some Catholic books right on her big centre table. I think they were Catholic books because I read their names."

"I that so? Well, what were the titles of them?"

"One of them was 'The Converted Catholic.'"

"The priest laughed outright. 'Ar the other what was the other, Bert?'"

"The other was 'The Escaped Nun,' father."

"Father Halpin patted the youngster on the shoulder. 'If that's so, it was something new that she bought.'

"I guess you'd better not try Mrs. Burdock."

Bert, however, was neither daunted nor convinced, and a few hours afterwards he came again to find Father Halpin.

"I've seen her," he said, "I've been up to Mrs. Burdock's house again, and she wants the book, here's the dollar she gave me to buy it with."

The boy's thin face grew whiter, and at length one spring day, when the skies were becoming clearer and the birds were chirping on the Linden trees, young Bert Tibbs died.

Father Halpin felt within his soul a deep and sincere sorrow as he thought of the young sufferer's early death, and yet that grief of the priest was tempered with something like celestial joy. A few days after the funeral Father Halpin, who had been so long a curate of St. Peter's, happened to get an appointment to Sag Harbor as rector of one of the seaside parishes. It was far out at the last point of Long Island, far away from city bustle and city jays. There a year passed with its engrossing works, and finally one day in the following Lent he came up to St. Peter's to preach a Lenten instruction for his old pastor, Father Brignoli.

After saying his Mass at the high altar next morning he turned in to see Father Brignoli in the latter's study.

"I thought I saw Mrs. Clement Burdock a Mass sitting in the front seat this morning," he mentioned.

"Oh, yes, she doesn't live far from here, you know."

"But how happens it that she comes to Mass?"

"I don't know, same as any other Christian, I suppose."

"Then she can't be quite as black as she used to be."

"As black as she used to be? Why, haven't you heard about Mrs. Burdock?"

"I've heard nothing at all since I left Brooklyn. What about her?"

"Why, we received her into the church some seven or eight months ago—an excellent woman, devout, strong characterized and the very soul of charity."

"And to what does she attribute her conversion?"

"Well, that's the strangest part of it. She says it was a copy of the

Cardinal's book which first turned her toward the Catholic Church, and she tells me, too, that she bought it from a ragged street urchin. He must have been an angel in disguise!"

"Ah, I remember it all now. Poor Young Bert Tibbs, I'm sure he's an angel by this time, but an angel without any disguise."—Joseph Gordon Daley in Catholic Transcript.

## NEWSPAPER OWNER TO BE A JESUIT.

Albany, N. Y., September 15. — Joseph A. Farrell, son of the late John Henry Farrell, one of the most prominent editors in the State, has forsaken the newspaper field to enter the Society of Jesus.

Mr. Farrell's change in his life's vocation came as a great surprise, although for eight years he has been thinking of taking the step. He is about 28 years of age, and upon the death of his father succeeded him as proprietor of The Times-Union. He took as his partner in this venture Martin H. Glynn, former Representative.

His income from The Times-Union is large, and his announcement of his intention to forsake a life of wealth for one of exacting hard work has caused much comment. Mr. Glynn has succeeded him in control of the paper.

One of Mr. Farrell's sisters has become a nun.

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