

Lessons of the House of Good Shepherd.

From the Pilgrim.

"Yes, I am here for a purpose." There was a ring of defiant laity in the words, and the speaker, Mary Carmelita, drew herself up a little proudly. She was a "Perpetual Consecrate," that is, she had taken a vow to remain for life in the House of the Good Shepherd, wearing the habit and following the rule prescribed for penitents. Thus, hers was an incessant martyrdom, for the human must make itself felt while yet the mortal breathes, and constant submission, even to the kindness and gentlest authority, requires a perpetual self-renunciation. I had learned to look with something akin to reverence upon this girl who, in her lowly vocation, evidenced so strongly the sustaining power of grace.

She was not beautiful in her picturesque habit, yet had she worn the world's livery she would have been called a good-looking girl. There was also a certain natural haughtiness of manner habitual with her which, amid elegant surroundings, would have given her the air of a fine lady. Plainly she was one who might have scattered evil upon the pathway of others, who might have steered her heart and deadened her soul until her ability to mar rivaled that of the most baleful character of fiction; yet (so wondrous the influence of religion!) she was an innocent penitent who had never done ill and whose daily trifling faults of pride or obstinacy must be condoned because of the magnificent burden of sacrifice she carried so heroically.

Ada had wandered farther down the garden with Mother Teresa, and being alone with the mysterious Magdalen, I expressed my interest in her character and purpose.

"My dear," I said, "I know it was not an idle chance that brought you here. Providence having guided you, will also bestow upon you a most magnificent reward."

Her countenance glowed and there was a slight quiver in her voice as she replied:

"One reward, one recompense only I wish for." Then, pressing my hand, she added: "Listen and I will tell you all, for oh! I need such prayers as yours."

Viewed from our rustic bench on the height, the convent was a dark red mass, half hid by foliage; far below, at our feet, flowed the A—, a dusky, shallow stream, and the quickening breeze was redolent of clover and mignonette.

Mary Carmelita kissed her crucifix and, raising her eyes to the faint, cloud-chased blue of the sky, continued:

"I am a native of our city. My father died before I knew him, and my mother at my earliest remembrance kept a fashionable boarding house. She was a handsome woman, fond of fine dress. When I was about nine years old I discovered that she had a passion for drink. She would remain whole days locked in her room recovering from the effects of the poison and left poor me to the servant. Well, as I grew older, I made up my mind to leave her. Little by little she had lost her fashionable boarders and they were succeeded by people dissipated like herself.

"Early one summer morning I slipped out into the street. I was very childish and free in my ways, and meeting an old beggar woman I carelessly tossed her the lunch I had carried from home. Her gratitude touched me and I told her my story. The old woman gave me this advice: 'Ye're over young, Alanna, to work out, and sure ye can't run the streets. Go to that big house ye see there, ring the bell and ask the good Sisters to take ye in.'

"I obeyed out of curiosity and love of adventure, and have now been here ten years. Often and often I wanted to go out, for I knew I could push my way in the world, but some strange dread always kept me back, and then once a gray-haired missioner told me: 'Remain where you are. God doubtless has some design concerning you which you would frustrate if you returned to the world. Here you may grow a saint, but there I would not answer for your soul.'

"I know he was right, and somehow a year ago I felt called on—and urged even—deep down in my heart to make my perpetual consecration as offering for poor mother. Long since I lost all trace of her whereabouts, but now every day gives me new hope. I do not regret my sacrifice, and though at times I grow despondent, desperate almost—I yearn so after the bright pleasant world—yet something within always whispers: 'Wait a little, you will have your reward.' And I believe it, and then it grows easy for me to speak kindly to my companions and obey

the mistresses. The other consecrated children, too, are very good to me."

Her face had paled again and there was a far-away look in her eyes—some shadow, perchance, from the ethereal blue into which she had been gazing.

Ada now came up with three of the "consecrates," who insisted on showing me their class-room, which I had not seen for some time. It was tastefully though plainly furnished; the walls were tinted in pale gray, which contrasted while they harmonized with the rich colors of the linoleum. I noticed a large bookcase, an upright piano and several etchings and engravings.

The children sang in chorus a soft, sweet hymn to the Sacred Heart, and then Carmelita played Schumann's "Traumerei," with exquisite expression. It may have been the sublimity mirrored mistily in the melody or photographed more clearly in the daily life of the player that caused these lines of Father Faber to recur to my mind:

O Time! O Life! ye were not made
For languid dreaming in the shade;
Nor sinful hearts to moor all day
By lily isle or grassy lay;
Nor drink at noontide's balmy hours
Sweet opiates from the meadow flowers.

"I must hear you play again," I said as we rose to go. "I did not know you were a musician. Let me congratulate you."

"I studied when I was little," was her reply, "and ever since I've been here Mother Teresa has insisted on practice. She said I need the help of music, and indeed it has helped me."

Circumstances prevented my again visiting the convent until several months had passed. Ada fell ill with typhoid and when convalescent was ordered to the country. I accompanied my sister as nurse.

One bleak December afternoon found me conversing with Mother Teresa at the cloister grille. I inquired for M. Carmelita.

"The poor child has had a great shock and a great joy," said the good religious. "Her mother had a most happy death, and, strange to say, in this very house. This is how it happened: In July last we received an application for admission from an inebriate, a Mrs. Wilson. She wrote that she felt a presentiment of impending death and wished to make her peace with God. The night she arrived several of the consecrated children were standing in the hall near the front entrance, among them our poor Carmelita. Mrs. Wilson passed close by the group in charge of Sister Mary of St. Gabriel, the mistress of the reform class. There was a shriek and a sudden fall. M. Carmelita had caught sight of her mother's face and fainted. When she recovered she asked to see Mrs. Wilson, and the meeting was most affecting. It seems the poor lady had gone from bad to worse, until her health was completely wrecked. She had been unable to trace her daughter, the few letters Carmelita had written having given no clue to her address. One night she had a dream. She had retired early, sober, but thoroughly dispirited, knowing she could not long resist the force of the evil habit she had contracted. In her sleep she thought herself fettered by chains, unable to move hand or foot. A veiled figure approached and placed a gentle hand upon her shoulder. 'Mother,' said the vision, 'why do you not pray? Why do you not pray?' Then, directing the eyes of the sleeper towards a large crucifix she carried in her hand, the white-robed figure vanished.

"On awakening Mrs. Wilson took the resolution to enter our house. As you know, the consecrated children do not mingle with the reform class; but the case being an extraordinary one, we permitted Mary Carmelita to spend much of her time with her mother, who was indeed fast sinking into decline. As the end approached the dear child remained with her night and day. Mrs. Wilson died in her arms. Since then our poor Carmelita is much changed. Vividly realizing the value of intercession and vicarious sacrifice, she now pleads almost incessantly for sinners and, I am sure, renders herself very dear to God."

Of late this willing victim has shown symptoms of the dread disease, and though at times I grow despondent, desperate almost—I yearn so after the bright pleasant world—yet something within always whispers: 'Wait a little, you will have your reward.' And I believe it, and then it grows easy for me to speak kindly to my companions and obey

cloister for Benedictine. From my prie-dieu in the gallery I could see Carmelita. The old-time haughtiness seemed gone and her face now wore a look of patient meekness; her eloquent eyes were fixed on the Sacred Host; she seemed oblivious of earth, nay, already on the "golden ladder" that reaches onward, upward.

Ada had fallen asleep over her looks. Long golden curls, disarranged, floated loosely from her shoulders, and the gentle face and graceful form might well have made a Raphael study. Sister love throbbed quickly in my heart to pray that this dear one might long be spared the bitterness and pain that must in some measure enter every human life.

Then memory framed another face as sweet and fair as Ada's which had been a familiar one a few years ago, and the thought of her love and what it meant to her and to the sister of her devotion elevated my hope beyond earthly ties of tenderness to the realm of the Divine.

CHILDREN AND THE THEATRE

From the sad accounts of the terrible theatre fire in Chicago we learn that a great many children were present. A large number of them fell helpless victims to the fire and to the mad rush of the adults in the ensuing panic.

Doubtless many parents, learning a lesson from the appalling loss of life in that fire, will keep their children for some time from the theatre. Since the life is more than the raiment, the soul is of much more value than the body. Many parents do not consider that in bringing children to the theatre they endanger the spiritual life of their offspring.

Few are the modern plays to which children on even adults can go without contracting some mental or moral stain. There appears to be no censorship exercised by parents on the matter, the manner and the costuming of the plays. All things go with the thoughtless. The human tide, if heavy enough, settles with many all qualms of conscience. The standard of conduct is regulated by the crowd. Yet we are told that broad is the way and many are they who enter upon the road that leads to eternal destruction.

The judgment of the thoughtless few is a better standard for conduct than the actions of the thoughtless multitude. When the crowd was departing from Our Lord because of His teaching, He turned to the few and asked, "Will you also leave Me?" And they said, "No, Lord, because Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Is "Mr. Bluebeard" a proper play? While we cannot speak from personal knowledge, we judge from some side-lights that it is not. We read in one of the accounts of that theatre fire that an actress who had just left the stage where she had done her part before the thronged house, was urged to hasten out on the street to save her life. "What! with this costume?" she asked, "I had almost rather be burned to death to so exhibit myself on the street."

She had been performing a part doubtless indecently costumed before 2,000 people, young and old. Yet a newly awakened sense of modesty made her hesitate to appear on the street for a few minutes as she had not blushed to appear on the stage.

What of the children who had looked on? What of the youths who went there alone or with their parents? Some may say, "To the pure all things are pure." They might as well say, "To the healthy all things are healthy." Our Lord says, "Those who love danger will perish in it."

A woman who was finally saved tells that as she was with the mad crowd in the aisle she saw a boy of about 8 years of age prostrate on the floor. He was nicely dressed, and the fight for life he showed his training in politeness. He said to the woman, "Oh! please help me up and save me." The woman tells: "I tried to reach him, but the mad crowd swept me on. To my lying day I will remember the pleading look of the large brown eyes of that little boy as he was left to be trampled or burned to death."

Many parents should heed to the mute appeal of innocence. "Help me up and save me." Do not expose the young to be tainted and destroyed by the malaria that rises in a cloud of poison from nearly every modern theatrical performance. Guard the young as a sacred duty. Our Lord says: "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Since prudent parents will not give edged tools to their children, they should not expose them to the raw contamination of the modern stage. "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise."—Catholic Universe.

A PURPOSE IN LIFE.

"You may jest as you will about it, but I am sure—Meg, you would be far happier if you had some recreation, something to fill up all your spare time."

"All my spare time," retorted Meg, "is more than filled up, so don't preach to me. I spend half my life doing things so vigorously that it takes the other half to recuperate."

As Mrs. Sefton made no answer to this flippant speech, her cousin moved in her luxurious chair to get a glimpse at the face bent so intently over the needlework. Not a beautiful face, as beauty is generally considered, but no one who had ever looked earnestly on that cheerful countenance and into those steadfast eyes, ever thought of Agnes Sefton as other than delightful to look upon, though few guessed the cause of the charm of look and speech.

Some such thoughts as these were in the mind of Margaret Brereton as she gazed on her cousin, and then turning scrutinized her own face in the long mirror before her. What was lacking in her that perfection of feature and coloring could not atone for? She looked at her own beautiful hands, on whose slim fingers sparkled many a gem, and then at the other busy fingers, unadorned save for the plain gold circlet. Was that the reason, the indolence of the one nature, the activity of the other? She stole another glance at her cousin, who at the moment raised her head and looked towards her, so that eyes looked into eyes—steadfast grey into those wonderful blue ones that had yet such a look of discontent in their depths.

"Well, well, Meg," said Mrs. Sefton, smiling, "are you satisfied with me?"

"With you? yes; but with myself? no. There is something wanting in it all. I know everyone considers me very fortunate, an only child, and with such indulgent parents; but I assure you, Agnes," and there was a suspicious quiver of the red lips, "I am often very miserable, and nothing seems worth troubling about."

Mrs. Sefton sighed; she could see only too plainly the other's life was all on wrong lines, but how to set it right? Though her mother and Margaret had been sisters, yet no two homes could have been more dissimilar. For her father as well as her mother had been devout Catholics and had been careful to instruct their child well and had taught her to seek happiness where only it may be found, in the faithful service of God. The other sister had married a man wealthy, as the world counts wealth, but poor in the only riches that can endure. Margaret was their only child, and both had spoiled her from her infancy. Every whim was gratified, nay more, anticipated, so that at nineteen she was already often wearied of her life. She often felt a vague longing to be more like other girls, and know what it was to want something, to be eager after something. Of religion she knew very little, for, although ostensibly a Catholic, Mrs. Brereton troubled little about such matters, beyond going occasionally to Mass, and had persistently refused to allow her daughter to do more. All this Mrs. Sefton knew, and her heart ached for the beautiful girl, wealthy and yet so poor. She would have liked to speak to her on the great duties and obligations of life, but feared her words would fall on idle ears; however, one could venture a little.

"You see, Meg dear, it all comes back to what I said in the beginning, you want an aim in life. No, don't interrupt, I know there is plenty to take up your time, but they're the wrong things and can never make you a happy woman, such as you deserve to be."

"You are doubtless right, cousin mine," said Meg sadly—"and I am often very tired of this round of amusement, but what can I do, what can I find to do?"

"There's always noble service for noble souls to do," quoted Mrs. Sefton.

"But is mine a noble soul?" queried Meg with a flash of her old wit. "Seeing in whose image and likeness it has been made, it would be a cause of sadness were it not noble."

To this Meg made no reply, and Mrs. Brereton entering, the conversation became general, and there was no further opportunity to enlarge on

the subject. As Agnes Sefton walked home through the crowded streets of the great city, she took herself to task that she had not spoken more clearly to her cousin; why had she hesitated to tell her that the heart created for God alone could find no happiness out of Him! Suddenly she paused, a smile on her lips, and changing her direction, turned into a side street. A few minutes' walk brought her to the church door, and entering she sought the corner where loving hands had erected the Crib. Kneeling there before the representation of that sacred scene when first the Sacred Heart beat for man, she poured out all her desires for the poor soul that knew so little of Him. And Margaret? Her cousin need not have feared; the few words spoken had fallen deeply into her heart, and again and again she found herself repeating the lines, "There's always noble service for noble souls to do." If she could find her life work, she would surely be happy, for she was now convinced that there must be work for her as for all. Full of this new resolution she made a list of all the duties and aims of such as she came in contact with, yet none seemed to suit her or to appeal to her at all. She would have liked to consult her cousin, but she was away in the country, and Margaret had to fight out her battle alone. Always liberal, she became almost spendthrift in her donations to every charity, yet the hunger at her heart was not one wit appeased. But at last the time came. She had just entered a large warehouse and was, as usual, immediately surrounded by those ready to attend to the wants of so liberal a patroness, when her attention was drawn to a group in the corner of the show-room. She asked the cause of the disturbance, and after some demur the forewoman told her that one of the attendants had fainted.

"Poor girl," said Meg, "I must see her," and immediately she crossed over to the corner.

A young girl, about her own age, but whose face was pitifully thin and worn, was endeavoring to rise from the couch where she had been laid, and seeing the forewoman tried to frame some excuse, but Meg took the cold, thin hands in her own, and drew her back to the seat. She wanted to talk to her, she said, a great hope throbbing in her heart, so all the others withdrew and left them alone. Very soon Meg was in possession of the sad story. How a heavy financial loss broke the father's heart and left them penniless and orphaned; how her mother had tried to keep the home together, but her health had given way and now the elder sister was trying to be both father and mother to the three younger ones.

"Clare is just sixteen," added Mary Grant, "and has a situation in a printer's, but the hours are long and the work tells terribly on her, and now I am failing, what shall we do?"

"Do?" cried Meg, with kindling eyes, "why you shall all go away for a good holiday to the mountains. No, you must not do that," as the poor girl burst into a flood of tears, "you make yourself ill. Wait here for a while till I speak to Miss Keene," and off she hurried, leaving Mary wondering if this were not some delightful dream.

Six weeks later she was thinking the same as she sat on the verandah of the beautiful country home that Mr. Brereton laughingly granted at Meg's entreaty. It was a strange idea, he thought, but Meg was so much in earnest, and he had never seen her look so beautiful as with that glad light in her eyes. So Mary and her young sisters were reveling in the delights of fresh mountain air, the color stealing back to their faces and hope to their hearts. For Meg had a great plan, and many a tall she had with Mary Grant and Mrs. Sefton, who was delighted at the change in her once listless cousin. To seek out those who, like Mary Grant, were failing in the battle of life and give them rest and ease for a while, and this not as a condescension, but as a friendly gift. "They shall be my guests, and their visit shall be as great a pleasure for me as for them." So Meg said and she kept her word. Overwrought governesses, worn factory and shop girls, found a rest, a home, a help beyond all they even dreamed of. And Meg's rare tact kept her varied guests in perfect harmony, and all had happy memories of that delightful mountain

home, for Mr. Brereton had given "The Heights" to Meg that she might do as she pleased.

"Oaly, pet," said he, "keep that look in your dear eyes and that smile on your lips, I'd give twice the value of 'The Heights' to see you like that." Mrs. Brereton was the only one who disapproved of her daughter's action, but she consoled herself with the thought that it was but a whim and would soon pass away. But as months went on and Meg's interest never flagged, nay rather increased, when she loved no place so well as "The Heights," where she gathered the weary workers for a holiday and rest, and gave joy to many a heart that else had been desolate; then Mrs. Brereton grew thoughtful, contrasting Meg's present mode of life with her past one, noting her cheerfulness, her sweetness of temper, and she drew her to her side one day and asked, almost humbly, for an explanation. Meg's answer astounded her.

"The reason, mother mine, the motive! To do what I can for Him Who has done all for me! Ah, dear," and she knelt beside her mother, "I have done a little for Mary Grant, but she has done great things for me. Beautiful, beautiful life, when spent in His service, and said, terribly sad, when poured out on passing things." She stole a look at her mother's face and went on hurriedly. "I was not happy, mother, nothing had any interest for me, till Agnes spoke to me of the work I should do. And when I met Mary Grant, I recognized that there was the work I should do, a work that appealed to me. So I took it up and she helped me with it, and with other things too; through all her trials and sorrows her faith never wavered and her loving confidence in God shamed my discontent. She it was who taught me the strength, the sweetness of prayer, and in that have I found all I sought." She ceased, and taking her mother's hands in her own, kissed them lovingly, and rising left the room.

It was New Year's Eve as Meg and Agnes passed along the crowded streets to the church they both loved to visit. On the way Agnes told her cousin of how she had gone that night to beg from the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, pity for one who knew so little of Him.

"And wonderfully has He answered your prayer," said Meg; "but are not all His ways wonderful? How good is He that He lets such as we are work for Him! Ah, Agnes dear, can I ever thank you for what you said to me? Those words put me to shame and roused me to action."

"There's always noble service for noble souls to do; you see I know you were capable of doing so much. See how your home flourishes, what lives you have brightened, what sorrows you have relieved. And do you know, Meg, I think, I see a great change in your mother."

"And I also. I am full of hope that she will learn what true happiness is. Here we are now."

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house," said Agnes softly as they entered the sacred edifice.

Later, when they knelt together before the Crib, another came and knelt beside them, and Agnes saw a hand steal into Meg's, and heard a low sob. With a heart overflowing with thankfulness, she rose and went to Our Lady's shrine, leaving mother and daughter together.—C. M., in Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

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