

MISS BOBBY

Oh, how the sunbeams danced and played with the lilac trees down by the little iron gate that seemed to Bobby's longing eyes the bar, or, more strictly speaking, the six iron bars, which shut her from the long paved street and noisy, happy street arable! No one knew how much poor Bobby rebelled against the wise but inexorable laws which mamma had enforced when a few weeks before, the family had moved to this suburban villa of a large manufacturing town in England. "Now, children," she had said, "you may have full scope in the garden, but positively must not go outside the gate."

At first this decree seemed very easy, and the little enclosure was a veritable garden of Eden, each one following the dictates of his or her particular taste, or lack of taste. Bobby's plot of ground was near the gate, and, as in the garden of old, the temptation came—to try, not the forbidden fruit, but the forbidden gate. Bobby's fingers lingered caressingly over the spring latch until a pressure somewhat harder than before released the spring and the gate swung open on its hinges.

We will leave Bobby standing on the threshold of what seemed to her freedom and happiness, and go back eleven or twelve years to a chill gray day in October, when Mr. and Mrs. Warrington were discussing a suitable name for their new-born babe. Mrs. Warrington was of a classical turn, and suggested many names of length, strength and beauty; Mr. Warrington had spent many years in the iron trade and suggested names that sounded very much like Manganese, Pyrites, etc., etc. that his wife protested, and the discussion ended by Mr. Warrington declaring that he fully intended her to have been a boy and he should call her Bobby until she grew to suit a name. Grandma had pleaded for "Mary," her own name, but mamma vetoed that as being too much like the little Catholic children, for, though neither Mr. and Mrs. Warrington were prejudiced, they knew very little of Catholic faith and practices. They were somewhat of the Church people, caring more for living up to a high standard of moral rectitude than for much church going and lengthy prayers. Mr. Warrington was singularly free from bigotry, and very often attended the Catholic Church when the music was good. He also appreciated a good sermon, and not infrequently started his Protestant friends and relatives by lauding the pure, unselfish lives of priests, and making comparisons decidedly unfavorable to the clergy of his own church, and especially to those of the dissenting sects, known among the lower classes in England as "local preachers." Freedom of thought, speech and action were characteristic of the Warrington household, and in this atmosphere Miss Bobby thrived wonderfully well.

But we must return to our Peri whom we left, not endeavoring to gain entrance within the gate, but meditating flight outside the portals. It still swings on its hinges, but Bobby's feet left its detaining bars far in the distance. At first a wave of shame and remorse passed over her, to think that mamma's orders had been disobeyed, but a sense of freedom, and the long vista of neat brick villas, drew Bobby with irresistible force, and she trudged sturdily on. Presently the houses ceased, building lots and detached residences took their place; at last a large walled building loomed up. This set Bobby speculating. "It's not a factory, or steel works; it's too quiet; it looks like a church, and a good deal like a prison." The sudden pealing of an organ fell on her ear, so following the direction of the sound, she discovered an open doorway, and as others were filing in, Bobby bravely swallowed a little choke of fear and passed in with them. Involuntarily she gave a little gasp of astonishment—for it seemed impossible that so much beauty, warmth and brightness could be shut up within such a gloomy exterior. She was in a church, for there were stained glass windows and an altar, but, oh! how much more beautiful than the table-like structure in her own! After taking in the altar with its myriad lights and flowers, she ventured to gaze a little to the left, when burst full upon her view masses of flowers and twinkling lights, stately lilies, rearing their heads above the bloom, but what hushed her breath was the statue which seemed to rise from all this wealth of color and fragrance.

Bobby thought for one brief moment that this was heaven, and that beautiful Lady with the pale blue mantle was beckoning her. She rose as if lured by pleading eyes, but a woman who had come into the same pew, pushed her back again, exclaiming: "Sit thee down, lass, the percession's comin'."

Mechanically Bobby sank into the seat, her eyes riveted on the face of the heavenly Lady, while from the side door children in white veils came slowly and reverently into the church, carrying at intervals little blue and white, or gold and white banners; the organ breaking out into a full strain, "Kyrie Eleison," the prelude to a Litany. Bobby did not understand all this, but when the children in procession resounded to the choir with an earnest "Ora pro nobis," she felt that it must have some reference to her beautiful Lady, and she softly fell on her knees. The singing over, a voice from somewhere near the altar began to pray for us, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us," the rest was unintelligible.

As in a dream the service went on, the sanctuary became veiled in the fumes of incense, even the face of Bobby's "Beautiful Lady" was partially obscured for a few moments; a solemn hush fell over the vast church until a deep gong sent its tones vibrating through the silence; then the organ, choir and congregation broke into a triumphant Laude.

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"Child lost, Child lost!" Yes, she is the one he describes, the "red dress" was decidedly hers; the "white pinafore" had undergone some slight modification in color, but the "sailor hat, probably worn on the back of the neck" and "boots minus a few buttons" were unmistakably hers, so she quietly walked up to the bell-man and said, "I'm found, please take me home." Of course, there was great rejoicing over the returned prodigal, but no fatted calf was killed to celebrate the return. A white robe, a somewhat lengthy address, followed by what the children usually designate a "prison banquet," or a minimum of bread with a maximum of cold water, marked the event.

The next day Mrs. Warrington talked long and seriously with the delinquent, and then listened to Bobby's explanation and account of what she had seen and heard. The longing to see her beautiful Lady again still lingered with her, and the words, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us," rang through her memory like a strain of sweet music. Furtively she finished up her night and morning prayers with the partly-remembered invocation. Some time afterwards Mr. Warrington informed the family that he had met a Franciscan monk, and had been invited to midnight mass in the monastery chapel, but he regretted not being able to take his wife, as women were not admitted. This opened the way to a friendship which grew and ripened, and when some months later the beautiful new church was to be opened, Mr. Warrington eagerly looked forward to the event, as the prospect of excellent music and the dedication sermon by Archbishop Manning of Westminster were treats not to be missed. As the time drew near, Bobby manifested great interest, and insisted on being allowed to go. The child pleaded so eloquently that Mrs. Warrington, thinking that some good motive must be impelling her, yielded, and one beautiful autumn day saw the trio slowly moving with the dense but respectful crowd towards the doors of the magnificent church. When they had passed through the wide stone porch, and the inner door had opened, Bobby thought she must certainly have entered the Holy of Holies, but her wondering gaze was fixed in a transport of joy, for there on a beautiful altar of purest marble, stood her beautiful Lady.

"Look, mamma! Oh, do look!" she whispered in low sobbing tones of joy; "there she is at last! Mother of God!" Mrs. Warrington followed the direction of the child's eager gaze and saw what she knew must be a work of art—an immaculate Conception of such rare and delicate beauty, that even her Protestant soul was thrilled as she gazed on that image of the pure and stainless Mother. All through the long and impressive ceremony, the child would turn again and again to the beautiful Mother, and when the preacher mounted the pulpit, and the vast throng that filled the church to its outer door hung in breathless silence on his every word, Bobby heard nothing, saw nothing, but the face of her heavenly Mother, and over and over, she whispered the words: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me now."

Who shall say that the dear and loving Mother did not hear the earnest petition? Some few months after, Mr. Warrington's position, owing to a great depression in the iron trade, became very uncertain, and one cold bleak day in March he came home from the office earlier than usual. His grave serious face made his wife suspect the truth at once. The company had failed, and he, with many others, were out of the position which meant so much. Bobby understood but imperfectly the blow which had fallen, but when her mother said in a despairing tone, "Where shall we turn for help?" instantly the thought of the church where her beautiful Mother lived, flashed through her mind, and she secretly resolved to pay a visit to the shrine so dear to her heart, and tell God's Mother the trouble and ask her to pray for them now.

With Bobby, to think was to act, and in less than five minutes she was out on the street. Unpleasant memories of her last escape had made Bobby more cautious, so she had confided to the faithful Anna, the little maid-of-all-work, that she was going to the church where God's Mother lived, with a very urgent message—a telegram to be sent to heaven—"I'm in a hurry, so don't stop me to button my boots and things, and—Anna—please don't let them send the bell-man after me this time. I can find myself if I get lost." "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now, now!" The still light from the stained windows seemed to play upon the features of the image of Mary Immaculate, and the ardent imagination of the child seemed to see a smile and gentle inclination of the head. Taking this as a sign of acquiescence, Bobby lovingly imprinted a kiss on

the cold marble altar and with one longing look at the face of her beautiful Lady, as though she would have imprinted it there, left the church and walked quickly home. Four or five anxious weeks passed and there was no reply to the many applications made by Mr. Warrington, until one bright May morning when the lilacs were again blooming in the garden. Bobby came in radiant with a big blue envelope the postmaster had just given her. "Oh, papa, I feel sure it's got something to do with the 'Lady,' for it is blue like her robe, and then the stamp looks strange." Mr. Warrington hastily tore open the letter and then called his wife, "Yes, mother, it's an answer at last, but it is an appointment in Canada!" Mrs. Warrington's face fell, she dearly loved her native land, all her dearest ones were there—mother, father, friends and a tiny green mound in the old churchyard where she had sadly laid a darling boy to rest. But her children's welfare must come before her own personal likes and dislikes. She bravely faced the question and after a long and serious discussion of the matter it was decided to accept the offer.

We will pass over the breaking up of home and old ties, Bobby's disconsolate farewell visit to her "Lady" and the voyage across the Atlantic, the novel experience in a new country, and look in on the Warringtons as they are seated at table on a bright September evening some two years later. Anna, the faithful, has come with her charges, for she felt in duty bound to look after Miss Bobby, "who has been her special charge since the day she was born," and who "wouldn't 'ave a 'at on 'er 'ead or a shoe on 'er foot, unless 'er 'anna was 'after 'er." Mr. Warrington is not changed in the slightest, and time has dealt kindly and lightly with his wife, but the children have grown taller and more robust. Bobby is almost a young lady and has acquired an almost dignified air. The question just now at issue is "Where shall the children go to school?" for they have just come to town. "Father," began Bobby timidly, "there is a convent quite near and I think they teach: won't you let me go and find out to-morrow?"

"Why, yes, you may; for I really think the 'Sisters' influence would be more beneficial than otherwise, if they will let my little heretics in among their flock," he replied. Bobby said no more, but eagerly set off the next day on her quest; she found the convent to be an orphanage but two of the Sisters went daily to the public school, a short distance away, and would, of course, take in the little Warrington girls. Just as she reached the top of the hill on her return from school next day she noticed a somewhat shabby-looking church, standing back a little from the street, the front half a little concealed by two large old willows; following an impulse she entered, and there, to her great delight, saw the gleam of a red lamp from the upper end. She knew at once she was in a Catholic church and looked eagerly for a statue of the Blessed Mother, but, oh! it was not like that happy memory of her early adventure in far away England. Bobby had read much and learned more about the original of her loved statue, but nothing could make her look upon love and reverence for the Mother of God as idolatry, and she faithfully repeated her little invocation to the Mother of God, and that Mother was slowly but surely answering the appeal.

The child loved to steal into this quiet, shabby, little church, day after day, and before the altar of Our Lady think out the question that perplexed her mind, until she resolved to ask the Sisters to let her study catechism with the Catholic children; she knew their prayers, and oh! joy of joys! knew all the Hail Mary, of which she had treasured a fragment for four years. After some demur, and only when Mr. Warrington gave his consent, did the good Sister allow Bobby, or, as she was now properly called, Lily, to study catechism. The result was as might have been expected, a desire to belong wholly and unreservedly to that Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. With an all too reluctant consent from mother and father and a decided protest from friends and relatives, the girl of fifteen received instructions, braved the sarcasm of an older sister and brother, but fortified with an unwavering faith in the help and intercession of her "Beautiful Lady," she became a Catholic. And for what? Go to that convent, in the busiest part of a busy city, and see if, in that black-robed Sister of Charity, who is surrounded by a group of children clamoring for just one more story about the Blessed Mother, you can see any likeness to the little runaway who loved the Beautiful so dearly, and who is still remembered in far-away England as Miss Bobby. —From the Canadian Messenger.

FREE BOOK ON NERVE TONIC. Under the Schoolhouse. Far up in Aroostook County, Maine, stands a small log schoolhouse. The winter term did not begin as early as usual last year, as the new stove which was needed did not come until December 14th. The new stove was a success. The boys had crammed it with dry wood. How it roared! Miss McAndrews, the teacher, was obliged to shut the draft-side and raise a window. As yet no ashes had accumulated in the bottom of the stove, and the sheet of zinc under it grew very hot. Soon the teacher was disturbed by a singular noise—an indistinct sound as of some one snoring in a low key. "Who is that?" she asked. All her pupils appeared to be wide awake, but the extraordinary sound continued. Do what she could, Miss McAndrews could not determine the place of the noise. It was a strange, snoring, grumbling note, in deepest bass. Awestruck glances were now exchanged among the children. Suddenly the sounds increased in volume, ran into a higher key and ended in a long-drawn yawn, like the whine of a dog. The yawn was followed by a heavy thump against the floor, as if some one had bumped his head there, and bumped it hard. "This under the floor, teacher!" cried Alden Coombs, one of the older boys. "This under the school-house!" With that a quaver ran through the juvenile assemblage, and one little girl began to cry. Several others ran from the seats, huddling together. "I guess it's a 'lucivee,' teacher!" Alden whispered, with excitement in his eye. "But I can tell," he continued, and got down on his knees to the crack between the boards. "How?" demanded Miss McAndrews. "Smell him," replied Alden, who was wise in the ways of Aroostook hunters, if not in arithmetic. He put his nose close to the crack and sniffed critically. "This certainly a bear!" he said. Many young teachers might have felt embarrassed with a bear under the schoolhouse, but Miss McAndrews stilled the rising tumult. "Sit quietly," she said. "The bear cannot hurt you. I will take care of him." Then turning to the expectant Alden, she bade him go with speed to the house of a lumberman named Leferts, about a quarter of a mile away, and ask him to come with his gun. The teacher now allayed the children's fears, preserved order, and even heard two classes in mental arithmetic. When at last Leferts, in red leggings and fur cap, made his appearance, she met him at the door and said: "Mr. Leferts, I think there is a bear under my schoolhouse. May I ask you to remove him with as little disturbance as possible?" The bear was finally shot through a hole under the sill of the house, but not without considerable "disturbance." The animal had evidently gone into winter quarters there. Apparently his "bed" was directly beneath the new stove, and the excessive heat of that first morning of school had aroused him. Otherwise he might have slept there all winter, with education in full swing overhead.—The Youth's Companion.

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