

THE PRIOR OF HOLY CROSS ABBEY.

Tim had been "making the Mission," and we found him on the Sunday evening following its conclusion on his knees beside his little cot, saying the rosary on an immense pair of beads, from which hung a brass crucifix of unusual proportions. He quietly waved us away with a flourish of the beads, which was not lost on any of the company.

"He wants us to know he has a new rosary," whispered Hugh, as we tiptoed out of the room to wait until he should have finished.

"Sh!" answered Mary, the guardian angel of the group. "Even if he does, it is something to be quite proud of. Mamma says those Mission beads have a special blessing."

Further remarks were silenced by Tim's voice bidding us to return, as he had finished his prayers.

"You have a new rosary, Tim," said Hugh, as we quietly arranged ourselves—two on the cot, two on the floor, Mary, by reason of her advanced age, in the rocking chair, and the baby on Tim's lap.

"Yes, and 'tis a fine one," was the reply; "and the crucifix beats all. If I'd happen to be in a strange place, and I dying, or among Protestants—which God forbid!—I'd have all the indulgences on this."

"That's nice," said Mary. "But don't you think it is a little large to carry about, Tim?"

"One can't have too much of a good thing, avourneen," said Tim. "There'll be lashins of room for it in my left pants pocket. I always carry my little one in the right, and I'll do it still—not to be making myself vain-glorious dragging this out and I walking along of a night."

"Do you say the rosary sometimes walking along the street, Tim?" asked Mary, admiration in her voice.

"Sure, I do," answered Tim, simply. "Where would be a pleasanter or more profitable occupation?"

We all exchanged glances. Tim was even a better Christian than we had thought, and we certainly had given him credit for a large share of virtue.

After kissing the crucifix with great reverence, and making us all do the same, Tim replaced the beads in his pocket and assumed the retrospective look he always wore when about to relate a story.

"Now, what'll you have this evening?" he mused. "Of a Sunday one should be recollected. Maybe you'd like some of the examples the Paulist Fathers told us at the Mission?"

"Were they funny?" inquired Hugh, quite innocently.

"Funny!" indignantly replied Tim. "Was it a place for fun, think you, and he drawing down all the horrors of hell fire?"

"Mamma said he spoke beautifully of heaven," ventured Mary.

"So he did, child, in the proper place," said Tim, adding cheerfully, after a short pause, "I'm thinking you're too young for them kind of anecdotes, anyhow. Whist! I have a story that'll please you."

We sat in an attitude of expectancy, while Tim ran his fingers through his sparse locks, cleared his throat, and began:

"Did you ever hear tell of Holy Cross Abbey?"

"Is it in Kentucky?" ventured Hugh, though the quick, scornful glance of Tim's eye in his direction made the boy repent his temerity as soon as the words were spoken.

"Kentucky! The original part of it was a mass of ruins before there was any talk of Kentucky. Where would it be but in Tipperary?"

"I might have known it was in Ireland," murmured Hugh, by way of apology.

"Well, that's where it is, anyhow, whether you knew it or not; and a beautiful place it was long ago, when 'twas full of holy monks, and the whole country side for miles around it a paradise of verdure and content and happiness. Quite convenient to it there lived a pair of gentlemen with two sons—twins, by the way; that were so wrapped in each other they were as one soul and as like each other in feature that they seemed to be one body. When they

came to the years of one and twenty, the father and mother were for sending them to foreign parts; and everything was in readiness for the journey when one of the boys fell ill, and in less than twenty-four hours after he was dead. Greatly as the father and mother grieved, their sorrow was joy beside that of the remaining twin. They had great fears of his going mad; and the worst feature of all was that he gave up praying entirely, and would have nothing to say to the holy men that had taught him all he knew, both reading and religion. The parents were in despair; but the Abbot of Holy Cross, a devout and sensible man, said to them: 'Let him have his fling of grief, and don't mind him, nor take notice of his vagaries. Whatever he may have against the God that gave and took his brother, the Lord can't cast him off; for He never forgets His own. And the angels and the Blessed Mother will be watching over him in spite of himself.'

"So after that they said no more to him, but only kept on praying themselves and had the monks praying. They were good, solid Christians, the two of them; and knew well that the God who made and died for us all never tried anyone, saint or sinner, beyond his strength. As for the poor young man, he did nothing from morning till night but walk up and down, up and down, with his two eyes on the floor. So it went on for a twelvemonth, and they feared his wits were leaving him.

"But of a fine spring morning he walked in to his father and mother, sitting in the drawing-room, and said he:

"Father, do you think there's such a thing as happiness for me in this world?"

"I do, my son," said the father. "You are young yet; and if you'll only give yourself a lift, you will find there's a happy life before you, instead of always moping this-a-way, and making ducks and drakes of your fresh youth as you are."

"With that the boy turned to the mother.

"Mother," said he, "I've been a bad son to you of late; but if you will give me leave to go out into the world in search of happiness I will be grateful to you, for here I can never find it. Father and mother both, I ask you will you give me leave to go, with your blessing."

"After consulting together, thinking the diversion of travel would be the best way of bringing him back to his proper state, they gave him leave and their heart's blessing. 'And,' says the old tale, 'he went forth the same hour.' He spoke to no one until after he had passed the Abbey lands, and that was a day's travel. Night was falling when he caught up to an old man, trudging along like himself, with a stick in his hand.

"God save you, sir!" said the boy, with due respect to the crooked shoulders and white hairs of the man beside him.

"God save you kindly!" returned the old man, lifting up his head and looking at him very friendly.

"May the smile of the Virgin Mary light you to rest this night," said the young fellow. "And can you tell me the road that leads to happiness?"

"The old man shook his head with great sadness, and said he: 'The smile of the Blessed Mother of God be your lamp three times over, my son; but the road to happiness I can not show you. Old as I am, and often as I have sought it, I have never yet found it.'

"With that he passed on his way; and the youth, looking up at the sky, saw the first star, and bethought him it was time to eat and drink. Unstrapping the bag from his back, he took out bread and meat and wine; and after that, with his knapsack for a pillow, he lay under a tree for the night.

"All the next day he continued to walk, without opening his mouth to those he met on the road; looking straight ahead, with his head bent and his eyes cast down, till they all thought him witless. When it came twilight again, he made bold to glance about him, and then he saw one coming toward him; and who should it be but a poor, sad-looking woman.

"God save you, sir," she said.

"God save you kindly," said he. "And can you tell me in what direction I'll find the road to happiness?"

"She stood looking at him, with a tear in her eye.

"Young man," she said, "you must ask another; for I have never known it."

"She passed on; and, after eating and drinking the same as the day before, he slept under a hayrick till the morning. The next day, in the evening, it was a young fellow like himself he met, a pack on his back and a stick in his hand.

"God save you, friend!" said the man.

"God save you kindly!" said he. "And can you direct me to the road that leads to happiness?"

"Said the other, gazing at him with great gravity: 'Once I knew the way, but now I have forgotten it; and the only road I know leads through the Valley of Sorrow.'

"And he passed on likewise.

"The following evening the stars were shining in the sky when he met a 'colleen' about his own age, and she leading a little child by the hand.

"God save you, sir!" said she, dropping her eyes modestly, and curtsying for him to pass.

"God save you kindly, my pretty maid!" said he. "And will you tell me—for you surely must know it—where is the road that leads to happiness?"

"But when he saw her let go the child, and bury her face in her two hands with the dint of crying, he wished he hadn't asked her.

"That night the wanderer slept under a willow by the side of a stream; and the sighing of the wind through the branches was like the echo of sadness in his heart. The next evening he fell in with a number of teamsters going home; some of their wives had been in the fields along with them, and two or three little children were dancing and skipping behind them. One, a bright little 'colleen' with eyes like the corn flowers, looked up at him laughing, and said he:

"Tell me, innocent child, where I can find the road to happiness?"

"Happiness?" said the child. "What is that, your honor? 'Tis a word I never heard in my life, and I am six years old and over."

"And you? And you?" he asked of the others, one by one, and they all gathering round about him.

"He's crazy said one. 'Come away, or he'll hurt us,' said another. And they ran like a flock of young deer to their mothers.

"That night he lay on the beach, and the waves sung him to sleep as one might a child in the cradle. Evening fell again and he still walking, ever walking. The sun was setting when he came to a churchyard—a weary old churchyard filled with graves. A woman sat beside one newly made, crying and lamenting.

"God save you, my good woman!" said he; "and I'm sorry for your trouble."

"God save you kindly, sir!" said she; "and thankful I am for your sympathy."

But for my sorrow there's no cure but death, that may unite me again to him that made my happiness on earth."

"Happiness!" said he, stepping forward brisker than ever since he started out. "Happiness! Then it's not unknown to you? Where shall I find it?"

"The poor woman, rocking to and fro in her grief, cried out, 'Here, by the hand of death, it has been buried forever.'

"With that he flung himself out of the place, threw his knapsack on the ground, and his stick after it, and tore his hair like one demented.

"Oh! oh!" he cried, and that's my case exactly. In the grave only can I find what I'm looking for, and 'tis only through death it can come to me. There's nothing left for me but to kill myself some way or other, for I'm in no way ailing."

"The moon was flooding the grave-stones with a golden light when he came back from his mad race along the road. It looked so quiet and holy that he opened the gate and stepped softly through the tall grass till he came to the newly-made grave once more. The woman was gone. There was a clump of larches near by, and the poor boy flung himself on the ground behind them.

"Here I'll lie, and here I'll die," said he; "and maybe they'll give me a grave yonder a-near the willows."

"With that he lay down and stretched himself out for death, like one that would be all ready. The scent of the hay from the newly mown meadows put him in mind of the fields at home; the breath of the sweet-brier was like that in his mother's garden. Oh, but his was

the sore heart as he lay there in the moonlight! It might have been an hour, or two or three—he never knew—when he heard the clink of the gate, and then a step creeping softly, softly through the path between the graves. With that he leaned upon his elbow, forgetting that he had stretched himself for good and all to die, and peeped out from behind the low-hanging boughs. At first he thought it was a spirit he saw, it looked so white in the moonbeams. But it wasn't long till he knew it for a fair young girl, with a face so kind that he thought it must have been the Virgin Mary. Another look told him he was wrong there as well; for she stopped for a grave facing the larches where he was lying. 'Twas queer he hadn't seen it before, it was so well kept and different from the others round about, and right in his way as he came to the trees. The young girl knelt down, and, said she, in the voice of an angel:

"Oh, my darling, my darling! the night was so beautiful that I could not lie in my bed, so I thought to come out and sing to you a bit."

"With that she bent down, tenderly kissing the grave, and then she opened her lips and let out a strain so soft and angelic that the boy behind the larches thought it was heaven. When that was over she lay her purty white cheek to the grave, and she saying the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. When she rose up her face was like that of one out of Paradise, so calm and content and innocent; and the poor, distressed fellow watching her could stand it no longer.

"Oh," said he, springing into the full of the moonlight, 'If ever one knew the meaning of happiness and tasted the fill of it 'tis you, angelic creature. Tell me, where did you find it, and how have you kept it even in spite of the sorrow of death?"

"Smiling, she pointed to the mound for a forest her, and said: 'There lies one who was my other self, my twin sister, my heart's core, Alleen. She was my happiness on earth; and that God has given her the joys of Paradise, that happiness is only taken from here to wait for me in the delights of heaven. There she is looking down on me; and, there, by the same token, if I prove deserving of it, I will find, when my turn comes, what can never be taken from me—everlasting happiness. There only should it be sought, there only can it be found; and human ear has not dreamed nor human soul conceived the wonderful happiness of heaven.'

"When she spoke the words the worn and weary young man fell back in a deep swoon. When he came to the young woman was gone, and he made his way out of the churchyard. That night he never stopped till he had walked ten miles of the homeward journey; for that was the place he set his steps to now. 'Twas several days before he got there, footsore and tired. His father ran out to meet him.

"And did you find what you went looking for, my son?" asked he, putting his arms around him.

"I did not, father," said the boy; "but I'm put well on the way to it. And whether it was by a spirit or a creature of flesh and blood like myself, I can never tell you, but you'll have it all as I know it."

"So he told the whole long tale of his journey to the father and mother, and when that was done said he:

"From this hour, with your consent and blessing, I will devote the rest of my life to preparing for the happiness of heaven, where the other half of me is waiting till I come. And as I know of no better way of doing the same than by joining the holy men in yonder Abbey, I'll make my way there the first thing in the morning; though I misdoubt will they take me in, in regard of the great scandal I've given."

"His humility was grand, poor boy! and, as you'd expect, they took him, and were glad to take him. The father and mother were loath to lose their only child, of course; but in those days 'twas considered a privilege to give a son to the Lord. He began at the bottom and went up step by step on the ladder of holiness till he was made head over all the rest, and 'tis said he was the saintliest prior that ever ruled over Holy Cross Abbey.

"And now be off with you, children, to bed. I hear the clock striking nine, and your mother will be talking. Run away! Run away! And goodnight to all, and God bless you! And strive all of you to be up betimes in the morning."—*The Catholic Standard.*