

SO AS BY FIRE

BY JEAN CONNOR

CHAPTER II.

BARBARA'S PATIENT

"And there—there was no letter, Bobby?" asked Elinor, turning wistfully on her pillow. She had been in bed three days now, for the red stain on the handkerchief had weakened her sadly.

"No," said Barbara, "none yet. But I'll go down again this evening and see."

"Oh, no, you needn't, you needn't," said the sick girl, wearily. "I know you hate to go to the quarry-store, Bobby dear."

"Oh, I don't mind it so much now, the men are not there—there is a preacher at the Union Hall, and they are all crowding to hear him. He is a new sort out here. Wears a long black gown, and has a cross stuck in his belt and has sworn off marrying, Daffy Mills says, so he can just travel around and preach and pray. Told the men how he had been in China and Japan and out among the cannibals and everywhere. They call him Father. Queer, ain't it?" said Barbara, with her little odd laugh.

"Father Lane."

"Oh, then he is a priest!" said Elinor with a catch in her breath.

"Priest or preacher, it's all the same, isn't it?" said Barbara, as she twisted up the coil of red golden hair that had tumbled down in her brisk race over the hills.

"Oh, no—they are not—not the same at all," answered Elinor, quickly.

"What's the difference?" asked Barbara, jabbing her broken comb into the rippling tresses, knotted now in her usual careless style.

"A great deal," answered Elinor.

"I cannot explain it to you, Bobby, because I'm not very much of a Catholic myself. But mamma was one, and she made papa promise I should be one, too, so he did his best. I went to Catholic Sunday school and church whenever I went anywhere, and I wouldn't be anything but a Catholic for the world, and if I were very sick I'd send for a priest."

"Would you?" asked Barbara.

"What for?"

"So that he would help me—help me to die," answered Elinor, with a shudder. "Oh, I know what dying is! I saw papa, and I'm afraid, I'm afraid. Last night I woke up in the dark and I felt so cold, so queer, Bobby! My breath didn't come right and my heart was jumping—and I thought I was going to die, too, before—before the letter could reach me, and that I might never see Rosecroft after all."

"What's the good of thinking things like that?" said Barbara.

"I'll make a bed up on the floor and come down here and sleep to-night."

"Oh, if you would, if you would, Bobby," said the sick girl gratefully.

"And if you don't mind—I get nervous lying here, Bobby—I'll get up in the corner of my trunk, and see if the black box is all right. Papa told me to be careful of it, very careful, and last night I had a dreadful dream that it was gone. It holds all dear mamma's papers and letters, and the certificates of my birth and baptism—all that proves I am mamma's child. And there's money there—all that is left of papa little insurance. I got \$200 when he died."

"It's all right," said Barbara, as humoring the sick girl's nervous fears she looked in at her poor little treasure-box. "Everything is safe, and I'll lock it up again as you can see. Now for goodness' sake turn over and go to sleep. I won't listen to another word or you'll be coughing up blood again," and Barbara turned her back resolutely, and with her little thin face resting on her hands stared out of the window, a pang in her heart—a strange, chilling pang such as she had never felt before.

For Elinor was dying—dying slowly, but surely, as both Barbara and Rip, croaking harshly on the ledge beneath the window, knew.

And down in the black raftered kitchen the old grandmother croaked in still harsher tones. "She'll be dead on our hands before the month is up. It is all your doings, ye Weasel. You would have her instead of the quarry men that would have gone off to their work the morn and given no trouble. And now there will be waking and burying and all sorts of work. And who's to pay for it? For the girl has neither kith nor kin to call in, its plain. Who's to pay, say?"

"You needn't worry," said Barbara slowly, and there was a somber light in the cold gray eyes. "There will be money and kin both, if half she tells me is true."

"Eh, what—that is that ye say?" asked the old woman, shrilly.

And then more to quiet her grandmother's sharp tongue than for any faith she put in Elinor's hopes, Barbara told the sick girl's story, the old crone listening with greedy interest kindling her sunken eyes.

"And do ye believe it?" she scoffed. "Do you believe all this grand story, ye young fool?"

"No," answered Barbara, "I don't—don't believe that anything good or lucky ever happens. But she does. She believes her grandfather is going to forgive and forget all the bitterness in his hard old heart—that he is going to send for her and take this girl he has never seen or cared for all these years into her dead mother's place in his home. That she is going among roses and trees and everything beautiful forever. She believes it all." Barbara drew a long, resolute breath.

"I am going to let her die believing it all, if I can."

And with this declaration, against which even fierce old Granny Graeme felt there was no appeal, Barbara sped off to the nests in the hollow to find the fresh-laid eggs for Elinor's lunch.

All through the afternoon she coddled and watched and scolded by turn, for Elinor had grown restless and nervous as the rainbow of hope darkened in the shadow creeping slowly but surely on. It was Barbara who built up the airy dream-castles now.

"If you are going to give up like this you won't have the strength to travel when your letter comes—as it may any minute. It's nearly a thousand miles from here to Rosecroft, you know; we measured it on the railroad map last week. But you will go in a parlor car, of course, and may be some of your folks will meet you half way. And it will be almost summer time there, I suppose, and you can just live out doors."

"Oh, yes, yes, I will." The sick girl caught feverishly at these shining hopes. "I will stay out under the big oaks. And the roses will soon be in bloom, and the honeysuckle. Papa said it grew all over the south porch."

"And they will have horses," continued Barbara, "and you can ride and drive whenever you please."

"I believe I would rather sail," said Elinor; "just drift down the beautiful shining river, Bobby. It would seem so much easier."

"Would it?" asked Barbara.

"Well, I'm not much on drifting. I'd rather ride, ride fast and hard on a galloping horse that could go like the wind. But you can take your choice. That's the lot of rich people; they can drive or drift just as they please."

"And dress or this please," added Elinor, roused to interest again.

"Bobby, when I go to Rosecroft I don't think I'll ever wear anything but white. I'm so tired of dull, dingy clothes. Of course I can't put on colors yet because I am in mourning for poor papa, but I can wear white, soft, cloudy dresses and pretty white ribbons. And flowers! Oh, I will always have flowers—big bunches of them on my breast or in my belt. Oh, if the letter would only come! Sometimes I feel as if I must get up and go anywhere. I have the money, you know. Just go and tell grandfather who I am and say to him, 'I have come out of these heathen lands. And though there ain't much shooting or praying or mourning going on, he's a hauling the boys in hand over fist. There was a good fifty of them stayed up there professing or confessing with him half of last night. I tell you the Sperrit is a stirring over here place, sure. Why, Micky Blake come over this morning and give me 68 cents he had sneaked from the till four months ago. I tell you, when religion hits you like that it's a sticking in. This here Father Lane is a winner, you bet. And he don't snoop for nothing, either. Why, Jake says when he heard that Tom Dealey's old bedridden mother was a crying and praying to see him he got on a horse and rode the good ten miles to Durham so the poor old critter could die in peace."

"And did she?" asked Barbara, who had been listening to this narration with breathless interest.

"Did he help her to die in—peace?"

"Well, she ain't—so to say—dead yet," answered Daffy. "But it's most as good as if she was. For Tom said there was no living with the old woman, she had got that crooked and cross and cantankerous, and since the priest has been to see her she has quieted down peaceful as a lamb—"

The girl at our house is—dying," said Barbara. "Do you think he would go and—help her?"

Daffy hesitated. The Road House, with its shadow, its blight, its flower-eyed, sharp-tongued old chateaine, was not a place to invite visitors, even from a missionary who had braved cage and cage—

"She is his sort," continued Barbara, eagerly. "I mean she is a Catholic, or a Papist, or whatever you call them. And she said if she were very sick she would want a priest to come and help her to die." The speaker's voice trembled over the word as Daffy never had heard it tremble before. "And—and she is—dying now."

"Did the doctor say so?" asked Daffy.

"Yes—just as much. He said he couldn't do any good. And perhaps—perhaps Barbara was still young enough to catch at any whisper of hope—perhaps this preacher might—"

"He might," assented Daffy, who found this new tone of appeal in the sharp-voiced Weasel most attractive. "I wouldn't do any harm to ask him, anyhow. The preaching will be over in about half an hour now. He gives it to them short and often, which is the right ticket round here. The boys wouldn't stand for a protracted meeting like the Methodys gave last year down at the Cut. Takes too much provender," added Daffy sagely. "Why, after them there circuit riders had spent a good two weeks a-watching with the mourners, there wasn't a cooking chicken for a mile down the Cut. So you wait, Weasel—I mean Miss Barbara, and I'll walk home with you if you'll let me." Daffy was leaning over the counter now, his keen but honest blue eyes fixed on the girl, who, with her faded sunbonnet on her lap, sat staring moodily out of the open door. "What are you so down in the mouth about this 'ere boarder of yours for anyhow?" he asked. "She ain't anything to you."

"Oh, she ain't," was the bitter answer. "You needn't tell me that, Daffy Mills. There is nobody in the world anything to me."

"There is somebody who would like to be, though," said Daffy eagerly. "I don't know why you are so mean to me, Weasel—I mean Miss Barbara, when—I care for you so much. Durned if I can tell why it is, but my heart begins to pit-a-pat whenever I see you coming. And just to have you setting there on that old soap box does me more good than taking in a five dollar bill."

The sharp answer, that was as natural to Barbara as the prickle to the rose, died on her lips. In the chill new shadow deepening around her the light in Daffy's honest eyes seemed a gleam from some far-off sun, to which all young life turns.

"You are such—a such a fool, Daffy," she said in a tone that softened the rude words strangely.

"I guess I am, Weasel—there, I've said it again—but it's the name I've always known you by since the first day you came, a little white, cold, sharp-eyed kid to the store for a bar of soap. I gave you a sugar-topped bun, for I thought—I thought you looked sort of hungry, and you flung it back at my head. Do you remember—"

"Yes," answered Barbara. "I wasn't a beggar—and I told you so."

"You did," said Daffy, with a chuckle. "Seems as if that 'ere sperrit and pluck of yours took me then and there, Weasel. For I had heard things, you know, Daffy spoke hesitatingly, as if he felt he were on dangerous ground, "and knew it was pretty tough on a pale, lonely little critter up at the Road House. Lord, you don't know how I used to long, those days, to take you in here behind the counter and give you a good warm feed. And that 'ere feeling has been a-growing and growing on me, Weasel, till now—now—Daffy drew a long breath as if he needed stronger voice—"now there's nothing on God's earth I want so much as you, Weasel, to work for and care for; and keep safe and warm and comfortable all your life. And I can do it, too. I've got \$2,000 saved, and I'm going to put every cent in a machine for grinding stone. I'll be able to take care of you fine. You shan't stay around here, neither. I'll put you in a pretty house, all new and bright and shining, where you will bloom like a rose."

"No, I wouldn't," answered Barbara, and the cold gray eyes she lifted to Daffy had no answering light in them. "I would be all thorns."

"I'd risk it, by Ginger, I'd risk it," said Daffy, bringing his hand down with a great thump on the counter. "Thorn or rose, you are the only girl in the world for me. And if you'll say the word—'Weasel, if you, only say the word—'"

"What word?" she interrupted him, with her little hard laugh. "That I will marry you, Daffy Mills, marry you, to be kept clothed and fed and warm? No, I won't," she said, firing up into sudden wrath. "I'll never marry any one for that. I'd rather starve, and freeze, and die. And—and—she stopped suddenly as she caught the look in Daffy's eyes. "I guess you mean all right, but marry you—I'd rather die, I tell you, I'd rather die! There! She started to her feet and flung her faded sunbonnet on her head. "The preaching is over. I am going to ask the priest to come with me to the Road House right now."

JOE'S VIOLIN

BY F. STANGE KOLLE, M. D.

Joe was poor. His father and mother had both died, leaving him alone in this great world to earn a living as best he could. Luckily his father had taught him a little about printing, so that he managed to earn enough to support himself by cleaning type and ink rollers and running errands for the printer who employed him.

Each week he gave up his wages to the lady with whom he boarded, keeping little for himself. This he would save for clothes and, once in a while, for a book.

One day he met an old fiddler on the street. It was cold and his hands were blue and stiff, and yet the sweet, sweet music came from the instrument he knew so well how to play. For hours he had been in the one spot playing tune after tune, but everyone passed him by, too busy to listen, too cold to stand still. Joe's kind heart went out to this poor, gray-haired man. In an instant he stood by his side listening to music that seemed to sound like his mother's dear voice far, far up above.

In his pocket he had 12 cents. If he could get 18 more he could buy the book for which he had long wished. His little ink-stained hand had turned the coppers over and over. The longer he waited, the sweeter grew the music. At last he pulled out the hand and dropped all the money into the trembling hand of the old musician. Merely it clicked and jingled as the thin, cold hand dropped it one by one into a ragged pocket.

A happy smile lighted up the fiddler's face. "Ah, kind boy," he sighed, "you are the first to pity me this cold day. My heart was low and I felt like giving up playing, but now I have enough to do me."

"I am very glad, sir. You'd better get a cup of hot coffee, sir, and go home, for it's too cold to stay here,"

minutes flew by and the men forgot their work. The printer came in, surprised to see his machinery lying still, and was about to scold his men when the soft music fell on his own ears.

He approached cautiously, in order not to disturb the player and listener. Softer and sadder the music grew, now gay for a moment, now low, now trembling, now like a storm. His heart went out to the delicate boy whom he had rushed about the heavy presses and type cases and he wept, and thus his men found him.

From that day on Joe became renowned. He had to give up his work at the shops, so great was the demand of the people to hear him play. Happy, bright days followed. He became the idol of his many friends. Riches soon surrounded him, but each night he would steal away all alone, unpack the old violin and play softly to himself the first sweet, simple tunes he had listened to that cold, dreary day when he gave his last penny to the old fiddler years ago.

GEMS OF CATHOLIC THOUGHT

FROM ADDRESS OF DR. MACMANUS ON OCCASION OF JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF BISHOP SCREMBES OF TOLEDO

I proclaim for you our pride in the fact that we have held fast to the faith as it was given to us by the Son of God nearly two thousand years ago; and the deep sense of unworthiness which we experience in that precious possession.

I ask you to join with me in the heartfelt declaration that there is nothing we prize above and beyond that splendid heritage.

And I will add to that declaration my own thought, that no one of us can come to maturity and pass through the illusions and disappointments of life, without arriving at the profound but simple conclusion that there is nothing worth while under the heavens but the Church of Jesus Christ.

That is, indeed, the lesson of life, my friends—that all else shall fail, and all else does fail, but that the peace and consolation of the sanctuary is without end.

It may seem a strange thing to say in such a presence as this, but it has often seemed to me that one of the reasons why we Catholics are so frequently and so sadly remiss, is that we know so well that peace does wait for us in the hush and the silence of the sanctuary.

It is so easy, we think, to turn and find solace, that we will tarry awhile in the glamor and glare of the outside world.

But when the world had bruised and beaten us; when we have been seared and striped with sin; when our ambitions have proved abortive; when we have been wounded by, and for, the things we love; when the hollowess, and the sham, and the mockery, of modern life are intruded upon us at every turn, and in every human relation—then, if God be willing, we come creeping back, satisfied to the nethermost depths of our soul, that there is nothing worth while under the heavens but the Catholic Church.

And it is well in these dangerous days that we should not lose our hold upon that thought—which is for all time and for all eternity—by so much as a single second.

There is nothing beautiful in the world and outside the Catholic Church that is not being made less beautiful by the corrosive action of a purely pagan philosophy.

So still and silent is the crash and the collapse of creeds which once were Catholic, that the sociologist seeking a cure for the ills of society is not even conscious that the ruins of religion are falling all about him.

The walls and ramparts of doctrine and dogma make no sound when they fall beneath the battering rams of destructive doubt, and change and infidelity.

But a groan goes up to God from the stricken souls whose spiritual life is crushed and buried beneath the debris of the social structure.

Men and women and children, who walk the streets to night in the full flush of life, are dead and dying as they walk, because the bread of life has been withdrawn from them, which is the breath of life.

Society is paralyzed and stricken while it seems to vibrate with health and vigor and excess of life—paralyzed in its moral functions, and stricken in its spiritual capacities.

All things that are beautiful are being made less beautiful—the babe murdered in its mother's womb in wanton defiance of the dictum of God; the child-mind poisoned by the withdrawal of religious direction; the home transformed into an anteroom of hell by the horror of divorce.

If there is a single human relation which is not endangered to day as the result of insidious innovation I cannot recall it.

If there is a single Christian virtue which has not been given a new name and a new meaning, I am not aware of it.

The difference between the Church and the world is no longer a mere difference in doctrines and dogmas.

It is a difference which involves the very fundamentals of Christian Revelation—a violent departure from the age old interpretation, and a flat denial of its supernatural message.

All America is asking to-day why the churches are empty. The answer is easy. The churches are empty of congregations because the creeds have been emptied of their

contents. And the creeds have been emptied of their contents in pursuance of the principle that every man has the right to make his own heaven and his own hell.

Not being sure of a heaven hereafter, he is busily engaged in trying to make one here on earth. In pursuance of that amiable purpose, he has made unto himself a graven image, and its name is Man.

Supernatural graces he has rejected in favor of a fearful and wonderful thing called progress.

This theory of progress, as nearly as I can interpret it, implies that each of us contains within himself a set of tools whose names we do not yet know, and whose use we have skill to discover.

By the use of these nameless, and as yet useless, tools, each of us is to make of himself a nobler and a better man.

In other words, modern man has undertaken once more the difficult and heroic task of lifting himself by his own boot-strap.

And in order to keep up his courage, and distract attention from the fact that he is making a frightful botch of the whole business, he stops every now and then and crows lustily over the achievements of the race.

There has never been a period in the history of Christian peoples in which the average man possessed as much miscellaneous information as he possesses at this moment, in regard to the affairs of earth life.

And there has never been a period in which so many men were cursed with so much misinformation concerning the nature and destiny of man.

If happiness came from the mere ownership of things, or the gathering of information, or facility in moving about, or in harnessing the forces of nature, this age of ours should be a veritable millennium of joy.

But the first man you meet who has lost his spiritual way, who is seeking life's all-in-all in the things of the flesh and the intellect, will give you an unflinching index to the dreariness and misery of the age.

Modern thought concerning the nature and destiny of man has resolved itself into a huge surrender of certitudes, convictions and opinions.

If there is any one thing a man must not have, nowadays, if he would retain his respectability, it is a sound conviction in regard to whence he came and whither he is going, and how he is to get there.

To have a definite idea of his destination and of the ways and means by which he may arrive thereat, is to set himself down as a reactionary and a dangerous citizen.

Vagueness with regard to the hereafter has actually become the grand central virtue of the age.

The world looks askance at the man with a definite philosophy of life and whispers sadly that he is narrow.

To speak coherently of the soul in the presence of ladies and gentlemen is the unforgivable social and civic sin. To win frantic applause we must lapse into glib imbecility, and gorgeous generalizations.

It is precisely those among us who are vague to the point of idiocy whom we hail as our boldest thinkers and our most indomitable souls.

By some strange fortune of reason and logic the world rejects the Christian Revelation as an impractical idealism, and then receives with cheers a substitute philosophy which fairly wallows in indecision and incoherence.

In modern parlance the man who is utterly at sea is "broad" and "liberal" and "sane," even though he maunders on with the incoherence of a lunatic.

Whereas the luckless wight who is quite clearly convinced that man is born in Original Sin, dies, and goes either to heaven or hell; that God created the world, and that Jesus Christ was His own Divine Son; that the world is actually made of these truths and stands ready to defend them—that poor man is dwelling in the depths of intellectual darkness.

This state of affairs would be bad enough if its blighting influence fell only upon the class which we are pleased to call intellectual.

But the same vile habit of loose thinking and loose talking has descended upon the proletariat and the apostles thereof.

The intellectual can go insane and the world be none the worse off. But when the average man goes insane—society as a whole begins to gibber and make faces.

Time was when the peasantry of the whole world was saved from the sins of their so-called social betters by lack of what the world called advantage. They were truly better and simpler and purer and wiser as a mass than the mass above which hastened to misuse the new learning. But there is no such thing as a simple peasantry nowadays.

And I am afraid of that specious sophistication which goes hand in hand with sin—which means that I am afraid of a Godless education, of a poisonous press, and a low, corrupting drama, and a lying literature.

It is the wholesomeness of the common man that commonly saves society. As long as he holds fast to his duty as a father and brother, and son; as long as marriage is to him a sacrament; and home a holy place; there is hope, even though the entire rotten structure up above go to pieces. He may be dull, and still be sane—slow, and still superlatively good. But when he too goes mad, and seizes upon destructive social formulas—the cataclysm is just around the corner. Now it is pre-