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OUR BOYS AND GIRLS. A LITTLE NEWSGIRL.

BY JOHN ACTON.

'What paper to-day, sir?' 'Same as usual, my dear. No,' with a smile, as the child was about to return the change; 'keep it. The Telegraph is worth a nickel—to me.'

Katie had never quite understood Mr. Crosby. To pay five cents every time you bought a three cent paper!

Near the Locust street entrance to the square, morning and afternoon, rain or shine, Katie Keran stood selling newspapers.

Katie looked down at her shabby shoes. 'I wish I could get a new pair, but I can't. The baby's to be christened on Sunday week and he'll need a clock and a cap. Nothing is so good for him.'

But what was this at her feet? She stooped and picked up a thin book bound in pink paper. Who could have lost it? She soon learned; on the front cover 'Maurice Crosby' was written in a bold hand.

Katie turned the leaves of her 'find.' Everything interested her. She read our Lord's promise to the Blessed Margaret Mary again and again. Could she have expressed her feeling she would have said that the ninth promise held something personal, something precious for her; 'I will bless every place where a picture of My Heart shall be set up and honored.'

Katie clasped her hands, and a wistful look came into her eyes. 'Oh, I wonder would He—would Jesus help father and mother? I could take the money to buy the picture out of my bank. There's twenty-five cents. I guess that would get one.'

It was nearly dark. In the square a grass-scented, bluish mist began to rise; fireflies (Katie called them lightning-bugs) shone and faded among the tree-shadows. The frolicking children, with their hoops and roller skates, had all gone away.

Our Lady, Help of Christians, never forgets. Katie had disposed of her last paper and felt very thankful. She dreaded the streets at nightfall. Didn't she hear that terrible man, wearing rubbers, so that you couldn't hear them tread, pushed boys and girls into chloroformed canvas bags and sold them to the Jefferson Medical College, and no one ever heard of them afterwards?

Katie, shuddering, hurried homewards. She lived in—street. At that time two-thirds of its dingy tumble-down houses were occupied by vicious and criminal whites and blacks. Here and there was a family, the head of which earned his living by honest labor. A strangely-chosen place was this for self-respecting people, the majority of whom—God pity them!—were Irish Catholics. But so it was.

A buxon-colored woman wearing a purple print gown and a bright bandanna stopped Katie at the entrance to the street. 'You be careful, honey. Your pa has been beating your ma again. She halloosed murder, and all the little children ran over to my place. Your pa took the Bible out with him. Your ma fainted. You can come over with the other children if you get frightened. Walk right in without knocking.'

Katie had become very pale. 'Oh, Mrs. Royer! I was afraid pa would. The police couldn't have heard ma halloo, do you think?' 'No, honey, I reckon not. Don't you be afraid about that, though, so long as your pa wasn't arrested. But the law! Here I'm keeping you, and your ma expecting you every minute!'

Katie thanked her kind hearted informant, and in fear and trembling went up the gloomy, ill-smelling street.

She found her mother waiting for her in the doorway. 'You're cryin', darlin', what's the matter?' 'O, ma! ma!' Katie sobbed.

'Emeline Royer's just told me about pa. Where has he gone?' Mrs. Kernan drew the child in and closed the door. 'I don't know. God forgive him! He took the Bible with my marriage certificate in it. In a South street pawn shop it is by this time.' She broke into violent weeping.

'O Mother of Jesus! Did I ever think I'd live to see this day? Him, that has a good trade—the builders say there's no better bricklayer in Philadelphia—to sell the Word of God for drink! The book blessed by Father Barbelin—Lord have mercy on his soul! And to be living in this den of thieves, out of pure contrariness, because I said of no place to bring up children! And him raisin' his hand to me whenever the fit takes him! Ah! it's punished I am for neglecting my duties. No confession from year's end to year's end. And his the same with him. Look at the five of you children. Never a decent shoe to your foot nor a rag to your back for Mass or Sunday school. Sure, it's heathens we've been—the pair of us—and it's comin' home now.'

She covered her tear stained face with her hands and wailed despairingly. 'O ma! don't, don't!' pleaded Katie, tears dimming her own eyes. 'Sit down here in the rocking chair. I've got something to tell you.'

'That I will, darlin'. Sure, if I hadn't my Katie to comfort me my eyes would never be dry. But first you run over to Emeline's for the young ones. I'll get them to bed before your father comes in—if he does come. They've had their supper. I'd go myself, but I don't want her to see my black eye.'

Katie was soon back with the little ones—two sturdy boys and two fair girls ranging from three to nine years. They trooped obediently up stairs after their mother and speedily forgot their fright in sleep. When Mrs. Kernan came down Katie nestled in her lap and drew forth Mr. Crosby's almanac. She read aloud our Lord's Promises to Blessed Margaret Mary. When she had finished the ninth, Mrs. Kernan, shrilling with a new hope, cried eagerly: 'Say that over again, darlin'.'

Katie did so. 'Why couldn't we try it, ma?' she asked, softly. Mrs. Kernan kissed the questioning young face. 'How did you guess my thought, darlin'? Sure, you're sensible past your twelve years. Yes, we'll get a picture, and may the Sacred Heart help us! And now you go to your bed, pet. I'll wait up for your father.'

Katie left her mother telling the beads of her rosary. Mrs. Kernan's conscience had been awakened at last—doubtless by a quickening ray from the perfect Heart which she had just invoked.

It was after 12 when Kernan came in. Frequent potatoes had not improved his temper. He leered at his wife aggressively. 'Drunk again, Cass.' He waited for reproaches. There was none.

'I think I'll go to bed, Mike. Do you want anything?' His eyes followed her in maudlin surprise. Hadn't he struck her only a few hours back? and here she smiled at him! That was what a fellow might call friendliness, and no mistake.

'You're a brick, old woman.' He offered her his hand. Mrs. Kernan touched it gently. 'I can't make you out to-night, Cass. Something's the matter.' 'Never mind, Mike dear. We'll talk it over to-morrow.'

Kernan staggered up stairs. An impulse she could not resist constrained Mrs. Kernan to prayer. She knelt in her narrow kitchen till the warm June dawn flushed the East.

A balmy, cloudless afternoon. Katie's heart beat lightly. She was thinking of the Ninth Promise. She knew a cheap Catholic bookstore, as soon as her papers were gone, wouldn't she have one of those pictures! What did she care now for the troubles of yesterday? Of course, she felt sorry for her mother; for her father, too. But hadn't she said the Litany of the Blessed Virgin last night, and wouldn't that set everything all right? Her heaven-born child-faith whispered 'Yes.' The Bible—that wouldn't be lost, either time, she sent up a fervent petition to St. Anthony.

Here came Mr. Crosby. Katie took the Sacred Heart Almanac from its tissue-paper wrapping. 'You lost this yesterday, sir,' she said, handing it to him.

Mr. Crosby handed it back. 'Thanks, my dear. You may keep it. I have another.' 'There was something else to speak about? Katie hesitated. Would he think her forward? Her mother had not objected to her asking him.

Mr. Crosby noticed her embarrassment. 'What is it, Katie?' he inquired kindly. 'Why, Mr. Crosby, why?'—Katie blushed at her boldness—'there's a little baby at our house. He's a boy. He hasn't been christened yet; he hasn't any name; and I thought—would like—if you wouldn't mind—to call him—to have him christened Maurice.'

Mr. Crosby smiled. 'Why, Katie, I wish you would. That will be all right. If you do, I hope he will be a better man than his namesake.' He slipped a bank note into her hand. 'Tell mother to buy the little fellow something nice with that.'

much; but ma wouldn't like me to take all that.'

'Then,' warned Mr. Crosby, with assumed seriousness, 'you mustn't name baby after me.'

Katie was not convinced, but before she could make further remonstrance Mr. Crosby was out of sight.

That evening Katie brought the Sacred Heart picture, had it blessed by one of the Fathers of St. —, and straightway set it on the 'parlor' mantel.

A week passed, Mrs. Emeline Calantha Royer remarked over the back fence to her next-door neighbor that the world must be coming to an end. 'Let me tell you why, Solfierina Bilde Jones. That Mike Kernan's been sober this here whole week. Don't tell me people can't let rum alone if they wants to. And Mrs. Kernan, she's beginning to look real pearl—that is, qualifying, 'she will wear her black eye goes.'

Solfierina Bilde fingered the brass handle of the hydrant meditatively. She was deep in a big 'wash'—for 'one of the most aristocratic families on Walnut street,' she proudly informed Mrs. Royer. 'It's certainly queer, Emeline. There's Mrs. Herndon—this wash is her's. She's a strict Catholic. Her son Percy, he took to drink. The cook told me. She got a Catholic picture—I forget the name—and put it in Master Percy's room. It changed him like conjuring. He has stopped drinking. He hates liquor now.'

Emeline laughed—her guess truer than she dreamed: 'I reckon Mrs. Kernan must have got one, too. Whatever it is, I'm mighty glad. She's a clever woman, and her Katie's just sweet.'

'Well, Cass, I've found a nice little house for us,' Kernan said that night—the first Saturday in years, that he had been sober. Please God, we'll be out of this rat trap by Wednesday next. It's down near Tenth and Dickinon.'

Mrs. Kernan gave him a grateful look. 'Anywhere, anywhere, Mike, away from this. The forgiving, kindly Jesus! How quickly He has rewarded the setting up of the little picture! Let us begin over again, dear. We haven't lived as we should; we ought to have had a 'Sacred Heart' to start with. There's no luck where there's no God.'

'I know it Cass. Something has made me see things differently the past week I've been a brute to you. You might have dressed in your silks if I had done what was right.'

Mrs. Kernan's lips quivered. 'Never mind, Mike. We'll forget all that. We're not old yet. And haven't we the children? We'll send Katie to school now, too, Mike—the poor child, with her feet out of her shoes! She'll not be wanting things after the baby is christened, I know that.'

Kernan leaned over and kissed her. 'You're too good for the like of me, Cass,' he said huskily.

Mrs. Kernan smiled through her tears. 'Don't say that, Mike, dear. Sure,' she gaily, 'I would not have let you put the ring on my finger if I had been.'

Mr. Crosby misses Katie's winsome face and sweet voice, but is glad to know that she is at the head of her class in the parochial school.

Master Maurice has developed into a fine-looking tyrant with a few teeth and many yearnings to talk. His mother, happy in her new home, feels that she will ever associate his baby-days with the blessed presence and providing of the Sacred Heart.—Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart.

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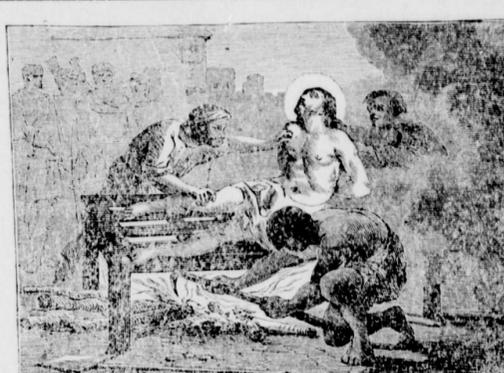
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