



SOME hundred and odd miles from London there stands a peaceful cathedral city. It is a quiet, old-world place, with narrow rambling streets, and solid comfortable roomy houses, shut within their pleasant gardens, on its outskirts. In itself it is scarcely picturesque enough to delay the passing tourist, its great attraction being its splendid "House of God," standing in its midst like a magnificent jewel in a rough setting. In the wake of the precincts runs a sleepy old river, and along the banks of it, by a narrow footpath, one can get out into the country, with its stretches of fertile meadow-land spreading for miles and miles away.

It was the time of the Trinity Ordinations, and all the ecclesiastical gardens were still gay with spring flowers. The city itself was unwontedly lively. Its favourite canon was in residence, and its still more beloved bishop was at home after a somewhat lengthy absence. The narrow High Street was thronged with a student population and with the friends thereof—fathers and mothers and sisters for the most part, who had come to see their dear ones take upon them the solemn vows of their Order, and to wish the lads "God-speed" in their new and holy calling. Birds of passage all these, but the old town liked anything that stirred not too rudely its habitual slumbers, and made them very kindly welcome within its boundaries.

The dreaded period of the examinations was just over, and though the formal lists were not yet out, it was pretty well known with all but mathematical certainty who were likely to have done well, and who, alas! had failed. Pending official declarations, the candidates, successful or otherwise, were in fairly good spirits, the unlucky ones not too hopelessly crushed; while those who felt they had passed safely through the ordeal were much absorbed in meeting and quartering their rapidly arriving friends, and doing the honours of the place to their 'people.'

Very various were the types of faces passing along the streets. Here a lad, the centre of a proud family group, there a solitary wanderer, who had neither friends nor associates to share his triumph or failure. Now the boyish face and bright blue eyes of some young fellow up for deacon's orders, still with the charm of boyhood clinging about him, though he would nearly have died of grief had he been told so. There a young curate in the correctest of clerical garb, with a couple of girl sisters hanging on his arm, who saw in him one of the coming lights of the nineteenth century church.

Outside the town the soft May sunlight was lighting up the cathedral meadows and turning to a golden flood the drowsy river rippling

lazily along between its grassy banks, so slow and calm in its scarcely perceptible motion that it was difficult to believe how it could rage and swell with royal anger in the winter, spreading out like a lake over the frost-bitten fields and working endless havoc in the canons' gardens.

It was a perfect evening, one of those days that seem to be dropped down to us straight out of heaven; yet to Austin Selby, pacing along by his companion's side in the narrow pathway by the river, it was one of the hardest days in a life that had hitherto known more of trouble than of pleasure.

They made a strange contrast, these two; the learned and world-renowned bishop and the unknown rejected candidate; and indeed it was with equal surprise that they found themselves in each other's company. But the bishop taking his afternoon walk, and thinking over his next theological treatise, and the young man striving to fight out his battle with disappointment and despair, had accidentally, as our faithless phrase goes, encountered each other, and somehow found themselves drawn into conversation.

The bishop was not a man given to standing upon ceremony. With all the stately dignity which he knew so well how to assume on occasion, in the ordinary affairs of life he was apt to act abruptly and on the impulse of the moment; and there were those who found in his very unconventionality his chiefest charm. In the present instance one glance from the keen old eyes into those troubled young ones had been sufficient to make him forget his beloved treatise for the moment, and to set him to work to find some balm for the intolerable hurt, and that with the tender skill which made him so truly to all his clergy a "Father in God."

His companion was no match for his cleverness, and, bit by bit, the narrator scarcely knowing how much of himself or his history he was revealing, the bishop got at the whole story, and found therein much food for meditation.

Austin Selby was the son of a poor country clergyman, and all his life had known what it was to live in the midst of a perpetual struggle to make ends meet. That his son should follow his own calling had been the one ambition of his father's life; and in the boy himself it was an inborn vocation to which he turned with all the wistful ambitions of youth.

To this end, with incredible struggles and self-sacrifice, Mr. Selby had succeeded in sending his son to college; but during his first year the great financial crash came, involving the Selbys with so many others in the worldly ruin, and in their case bringing death and desolation in its train. Philip Selby never recovered the overthrow of his hopes, and died of what we are sometimes sceptically inclined to call an 'impossible' complaint, but which is none the less a sad reality—a broken heart. And his son found himself at barely twenty at the end of his career, with all his hopes and dreams fading into nothingness, and with an ailing mother and several younger brothers and sisters who looked to him alone for support and protection.

As he turned his back on his college for the last time, Selby knew something of the meaning of the bitterness of life, although he was but little more than a boy.

Fortunately, neither he nor his sister Patience, who was a year or two his senior, had much time to think about themselves in the innumerable and pressing claims that came upon them. A distant relative offered the young man a post in his bank; the appointment was fairly well paid, and he accepted it with thankfulness, and in due course tried to settle down and to forget his old dreams of wider life and more definite service in the intricacies of the business which he detested, yet strove so loyally to do well.

After a while the struggle grew easier, he had a curious feeling at times as if he had lost a limb or a sense, and should go through life in consequence maimed or dumb; but he strove to put the past into the background, and no one seeing him, if grave yet uniformly cheerful and unselfish, could have guessed what he had gone through; no one except his elder sister, to whom he was all in all.

To Patience Selby the knowledge of her brother's sacrifice was more than she could bear.

The little money that had been rescued from their late disasters he insisted on settling on his mother and sisters, refusing almost angrily their entreaties that he should take it and finish his college course. His mother grieved silently, but Patience would not give up hope, and began to plot and plan against her brother's peace. She would not let him do this thing. Herself a clever musician, and well-known in their own neighbourhood, she had soon more work and pupils than she could well undertake, and she began to save diligently.

One day when Austin had laughingly accused her of becoming a regular miser, she unfolded to him her plan, of which she had as yet dared to speak to no one. This was no less than that in the course of a year or two he should take their mutual savings, go through a theological college, getting if not the best training, the best that could be had, and thus finally realize their great ambition and enter the priesthood.

At first he would not hear of it, but she would give him no rest, and the old hopes came back with a rush at the first glimpse of a possibility, oversweeping all their strongholds of opposition. To both it meant years of stinting and hard work, during which it was Patience who kept a fearless heart and would hear no word of giving up when her brother shrank from involving her in the necessary sacrifices.

They accomplished their end at last, although Selby was nearly six-and-twenty before the requisite means were within their grasp. Everything looked bright and hopeful, a tiny unexpected legacy had smoothed matters at home, an old friend of his father's had offered to take the young man as his deacon as soon as he was ordained, while his kinsman at the bank was so far touched by the efforts of the two young people—though he looked upon their wishes as utter folly—that he promised to take Austin back into the bank on the unheard-of possibility of his failing. "For it's as well to have two strings to your bow, with a young family like yours at your heels," he said, somewhat grimly, "in case you shouldn't prove the genius that Patience thinks you."

And the ex-clerk acquiesced ruefully and was grateful, though he hoped with all his might that he had done with cash-books and ledgers for ever!

For a time all went well, but towards the end of his term things began to look blacker. Never very strong, an inopportune attack of illness threw him back and broke in upon his time. He began to work too soon, and worked too hard, got over-strained and anxious, found his brains cloudy and confused, yet dared not give himself the much-needed rest.

The examinations loomed before him like dark on-coming clouds, pregnant with impending disaster.

(To be continued.)