

## A NEW YEAR'S PRAYER.

(Marian White in *Catholic World*.)

ROBERT BROWNLY was a proud man as he gazed that first morning of the year on a scene as lovely as any that a New Year sun ever shone upon. His young wife, in her dainty morning gown, was bending over the cradle of her baby boy; the child, who had just awakened, was extending one pretty dimpled hand towards its mother's face.

That face alone was a study. The newly-awakened tenderness, the soft flush of maternal pride, lent a beauty almost holy to the delicate and youthful features. Robert stood looking at the picture for some minutes in silence. Then, as the pretty mother picked up the laughing boy and turned towards him, he exclaimed: "I wonder if any fellow ever had before as genuinely happy a New Year as this. I can well afford to wish every man, woman, and child to-day 'a Happy New Year' without the smallest grudge in the world."

"And you, too, are happy, Lillian. Isn't it so?" he said, seeking her blue eyes for confirmation of her perfect contentment. But Lillian was bending over her boy and did not look up, though she said, with a little laugh: "I know I ought to be happy, Robert, if I were as good as you are, or baby. Who ever had such a darling boy, or such a good husband?"

"Ah!" said Robert, laughing in the abundance of his good humor, "I am afraid my wife is becoming very artful."

Then, as she blushed a little, he laughed again, and said: "No, Lillian, that is the last accusation I would want to make against my wife, and the most unmerited. Do you know," he continued, walking towards the window and looking out, "I sometimes think it is very strange that I should be so exceptionally fortunate in everything. I am a crank on the subject of sincerity. If I find any one guilty of the smallest deceit I want to end my acquaintance with him then and there. Now suppose I had married a tricky woman. I might have done it. Men in love are blind, you know, and I might have had my eyes opened too late. Good heavens! how I should have hated the deceitful creature! I can't imagine a more miserable fate than to despise the woman one has married." And his usually genial face was drawn into a most withering scowl.

"Which reminds me," he said, as his features relaxed and he smiled at his imaginary difficulties, "that my wife is a strictly truthful creature as well."

"Yes," to the servant who announced a gentleman in the library; "I will see him in a moment. Eh? He is in a hurry? Well—" And after kissing his wife and baby he left the room. Just then nurse came in to take the baby, and Lillian was left alone.

"O my God!" she cried, sinking on her knees and covering her face with her hands, "how shall I ever tell him now? I could not bear it!"

The New Year had come to Lillian as it comes to us all, a stopping-place for reflection, a halt on the road, a fresh starting-point. All other days whirl over us and bear us on unconsciously; but New Year's day pulls us up suddenly, as it were, and compels us, willing or unwilling, to consider how far we have gone and whither we are going.

A few years previous to this time Lillian Nelson had been a bright, happy girl. Though an orphan, and so impoverished at her parents' death that she had been obliged to earn her daily bread as a telephone operator, her cheerfulness, frankness, and candor made her a universal favorite. Lillian's mother had been an Irish Catholic, her father a convert. In spite of the loss of both parents at an early age, and though surrounded by Protestants, she continued firm in the practice of her religion. Suddenly the girl's fortune changed. She was invited to visit her father's sister, Mrs. Carlton, a rich and influential lady, and upon that personage taking a fancy to her, she was practically adopted, and became the daughter of the house. The girl soon became warmly attached to her aunt, and the latter exerted an astonishing influence over her niece. Unfortunately, that power was soon used to break down the girl's piety and faith. Lillian's was essentially a clinging nature. She would have made the

typical old-time heroine—gentle, confiding, and submissive; but pretty and lovable as such a nature may appear in romance, and often in reality, it lacks the element of strength, which is as necessary a part of a perfect woman's character as a certain elastic firmness is an essential quality of all plants that grow. It is fair to say, however, that Lillian would have resisted any open opposition to her religion. Mrs. Carlton never opposed her openly.

"Ah! going to church so early this morning?" the latter would say as Lillian prepared for Mass. "I really hoped you would breakfast with me; I wanted to have a little chat;" or, "I don't feel well, and I should like to have you stay with me this morning."

At first Lillian always had a polite but firm answer ready for such an excuse, but gradually she began to grow lax and to yield point after point. Again, Mrs. Carlton would remark quietly, as her niece was going to make a call or preparing for a reception:

"It is not necessary, my dear, to tell any one what church you go to. So-and-So and So-and-So are Protestants; and it is no one's business but yours what sect you belong to."

"I am not ashamed of my religion, Aunt Caroline," Lillian once said proudly; but imperceptibly the impression took root in her mind that her religion was a subject to be kept in the back-ground.

When Robert Brownly appeared upon the scene as a suitor for the young girl's hand Mrs. Carlton, who considered him a most eligible *parti*, cautioned Lillian more plainly and decidedly than she had ever done before to say nothing about her religion. For a moment the spark of faith still glimmering in the girl's breast flashed in her eyes:

"No, aunt, I have kept silence too much already about my religion, and if Robert Brownly asks me to be his wife I will certainly tell him that I am a Catholic. He will have to consider whether that is a serious objection before he goes any further."

"You silly little goose," said Mrs. Carlton. "All that is very fine, but it is nonsense. No one urges you to tell a lie. You have simply to say nothing on the subject. Nobody imagines that my niece is a Catholic, so there will be no questions asked. When you are married, no doubt, you can tell him all, and he will be perfectly satisfied. I understand men better than you do, little girl," she continued caressingly, "and I know that a trifle can crush a love affair in the beginning. It would be such a pity, for Robert Brownly is a splendid fellow and just suited for you, I think. Besides, I am sure that you love him already."

The girl could not deny that she loved him. Yet, although Mrs. Carlton urged that the Brownlys had always been the strictest Protestants and had never been known to marry Catholics, Lillian did not promise to keep silence. It was only when her jealousy and pique were aroused that she yielded to the temptation and tried to make herself believe that she would make it right—*afterwards*.

So the Catholic girl was married by a Protestant minister. After marriage the stumbling-block her guilty silence had thrown across her path loomed up before her as a mountain. When she knew Robert better she did not fear so much that he would object to her religion, but she dreaded to reveal her hypocrisy. Her love and esteem for him, and consequently her desire to appear well in his eyes, had grown stronger each day. Robert was the soul and truth of honor. He detested anything like deceit. How, then, could she tell him that she, his wife whom he loved and trusted, had concealed from him so important a fact as her religion?

Though Lillian's spirits were buoyed up by her natural gaiety, though she was pleased and interested in her home, her husband and her baby, yet her conscience was still alive and gave her many uncomfortable hours. At last, on New Year's morning when Robert found her leaning over her baby's crib, looking in those innocent eyes, she had resolved, cost what it might, she would be a hypocrite no longer. She would confess all and repair her guilt. She might neglect her duties, lose her own soul, but how could she leave the little soul that God had entrusted to her care unbaptized? Her faith was still strong enough to make her feel that this was little short of a crime, and that if her child should die unbaptized the evil would be irreparable. Such a possibility