

hibition hall on that fair graduation day when Alice had sung like an angel and won the plaudits of an outside world. She remembered how happy Alice had declared herself, and how she manifested her intention of returning after vacation to enter novitiate. The dear Sister, smiling at her impulsiveness, had said: "It may be different when you see the world, poor child. Sometimes I tremble for you—you are so beautiful, so talented." Alice had laughed at the Sister's fears, and then—Mrs. Johnson entered the room.

"Josie! You have returned my call at last! One feels doubly a stranger when one's friends are almost next door and remain there." "A thousand reasons, Alice, for such apparent neglect. And yet I wonder what you will say when you know my errand."

"Charity, of course. They tell me you are the busiest woman in town, and all for others. Compared to you I am a useless butterfly."

"I should rather call you a hummingbird, especially tonight, when I come to ask you to sing for charity."

"That request is readily granted. I sang for money so long, it is only right that I should do something for pure charity. You are going to have a concert for the poor, I presume."

"No, not exactly. I want you to sing at the High Mass at Christmas."

Mrs. Johnson blushed and looked startled.

"That is different, Josie. I am afraid I cannot. You—Mr. Johnson—well I should have to consult him."

"Why, Alice, you do not mean that you must ask him for such a service as that? To sing in your own church?"

"My own church, yes, but not our church, and there is all the difficulty. I am so glad you came tonight, Josie. There is nothing so happy as this evening, and it is a comfort to me to have a friend of the old days to confide in."

There were tears in her eyes as she arose and brought her chair close to Mrs. Dillon.

"Why are you so unhappy, Alice? You have everything to live for."

"Yes, and still nothing to live for. I have fame, wealth, a devoted husband, and yet unhappiness. Your presence intensifies it, by contrasting the present with the old convent days. Dear Sister—how often she told me that she had fears for me on account of my voice; but God gave me that voice, and when I saw how people were charmed by it my soul was fired with an ambition to make the whole world listen. You do not know what an ambition it is to me it was wealth, fame, everything earth can give, and it inspired me to study hard. You remember when I went to Italy to study with Lustrini. A dear friend of my father made it possible. Another pupil was Mrs. Johnson, my husband's first wife, a beautiful, amiable woman who took a deep interest in me, and made her husband also interested himself. You know my leap to fame, my debut, my laurels everywhere. The Johnsons were as pleased as I. Mrs. Johnson died the next season, when I sang at the Metropolitan. Two years after, he asked me to marry him, and I did willingly, for I had come to love him dearly. But there was a cloud over my happiness, for I had married a man who was not what I needed. Then, my heart was in the world. He had been a Catholic, but now was an atheist, I practically a pervert. But when our child was born and he refused to have it baptized my slumbering faith began to rebel. One night I came from the theatre, after a grand success, to find my child dead—and unbaptized! That was my last appearance. I became ill; he would not let me return to the stage—and here I am."

"But does he not relent?"

"On the contrary, he is more insistent. I argued at first, finally gave it up, and am now settled down into an obedient, loving wife."

"But your soul, Alice?"

"Never at peace, Josie, and that is why I am going back to the stage. My voice is better than ever, and it will give me something to think about. But I detain you. I will ask my husband, though I fear he will refuse."

She ascended the stairs slowly, thinking deeply and formulating her argument. Dr. Johnson was reading when she entered his study, but quickly laid aside his book as if to conceal it.

"Oh, it's you, Alice. You startled me."

"And now I will startle you still more. Mrs. Dillon my old convent companion—you remember our charming hostess at Naples—comes to press me to sing."

"Sing where, Alice?"

"At St. Jerome's Church."

"Roman Catholic, of course."

"Yes."

"You know, dear, I do not approve of such things. How can you desire to mingle with such people?"

"You are so proud, Herbert, and this is the season of humility."

"Of humility?"

"Yes, it is the season of the Babe of Bethlehem." She wended at her boldness as she spoke. "It is Christmas, when all differences should be forgotten. You have given me many gifts. Herbert, may I not ask a small favor from you now?"

He was silent for a moment, as if meditating.

"For this once, Alice, yes. I see you are still singing for Egypt. You may tell Mrs. Dillon yes."

She could scarcely believe her ears. Was he relenting? Or was it the

presence in his house of Mrs. Dillon and the fear that he would seem bigoted? She could not tell. She only knew that hitherto he had raised at God and religion as hypocrites, and now—she could not explain it, but a smile was forced upon her face as she rejoined Mrs. Dillon.

To Alice Johnson it was the most beautiful Christmas morning she had seen for many years. She was in feeling a girl again as she stood waiting for the car to take her to church. It seemed to Dr. Johnson as he came down the stairs that she had never looked so beautiful, so happy, since the gala night at the Metropolitan when a great city gave homage to the American nightingale.

"I wish you a great success this morning, Alice. The revelation will come from the wrong part of the church today."

"Thank you, Herbert, but revelations do not come from sinners."

"I do not so classify you."

"But I do; a Catholic who is false to her conscience can hardly be called a saint."

He laughed, but there was no ring of merriment in the sound.

"These are serious thoughts for a merry Christmas, Alice. But really your voice will astonish them to-day. I'd like to see your triumph."

"Yes, sir; I will."

"I should say it was about half past seven when we rode in at the gates of the cemetery and made for the section which, by the French Government, was reserved for our people. For more than a year now, dating from the time I write this down, a good many thousands of Americans have been stationed in or near this port, and many, many times that number have passed through it. So, quite naturally, though it is hundreds of miles from any of the past or present battle fronts, we have had some deaths, where from accident or disease."

We rounded a turn in the winding road, and there, before us, stretched the graves of our dead—soldiers, sailors, marines, and members of labor battalions; whites and blacks and yellow men; Jews and Gentiles, Catholics, Protestants and Mohammedans—for there were four followers of the faith of Islam taking their last sleep here in this consecrated ground now upon rows of them, each marked, except in the case of the Mohammedans, by a plain white cross bearing in black letters the name, the age, the rank and the date of death of him who was there at the foot of the cross.

Just beyond the topmost line of crosses stood the temporary wooden platform, dressed with bunting and flags, where an American admiral and an American brigadier, a group of French officers headed by the major general, a distinguished French official, and three chaplains representing three creeds, were to unite at noon in an hour of devotion and tribute to the memories of these three hundred-and-odd men of ours who had made the greatest of all human sacrifices.

But it was not the sight of rows of graves and the lines of crosses, or the peculiar devices uprearing slantwise at head and foot of the four graves of the Musselmans, or the brave play of tricolored bunting upon the sides and front of the platform yonder which caught my attention. For at that hour the whole place was alive with French people—mostly women in black, but with a fair sprinkling of old men and children among them. All were busy at a certain task—and that task was the decorating of the graves of Americans.

As we left the car to walk through the plot I found myself taking off my cap; and I kept it off all the while I was here, for even before I had been drawn from the well to the group I knew. I stood in the presence of a most high and holy thing, and so I went bareheaded, as I should have done in any sanctuary.

We walked all through this God's acre of ours, the general and I. Some of the women who labored therein were old and bent; some were young but all of them wore black gowns. Some faintly had been drawn from the well to the group I knew. I stood in the presence of a most high and holy thing, and so I went bareheaded, as I should have done in any sanctuary.

Here would be a grave that was marked with wreaths of simple field flowers or with the great fragrant white and pink roses which grow so luxuriantly on this coast. Here would be merely great sheaves of loose blossoms; there a grave upon which the flowers had been scattered broadcast until the whole mound was covered with the fragrant dewy offering; and there, again, I saw graves where fingers patiently unused to such employment had fashioned the long stemmed roses into wreaths and crosses, and even into the form of shields.

THE GENERAL EXPLANATIONS

Grass grew rich and lush upon all the graves. White sea shells marked the sides of them and edged the narrow graveled walks between the rows. We came to two newly made graves. Their occupants had been buried there only a day or so before, as one might tell by the marks in the trodden turf, but a carpeting of sod cut from a lawn somewhere had been so skillfully pieced together upon these two mounds that the raw clods

of clay beneath were quite covered up and hidden from sight; so now only the seams in the green coverlets distinguished these two from graves that were older by weeks or by months.

Alongside every grave knelt a woman, and/or else a woman with children, aiding her as she disposed her showing of flowers and wreaths to the best advantage. Mainly the old men were putting the paths in order, raking the gravel down smoothly and straightening the borderings of shells. There were no soldiers among them; all were civilians, and for the most part humble-appearing civilians, clad in shabby garments. But I marked two old gentlemen, wearing the great black neckerchiefs and the flowing black broadcloth coats of ceremonial days, who seemed as deeply intent as any in what to them must have been an unaccustomed labor.

Coming to each individual worker or each group of workers, the general would halt and formally salute in answer to the silent murmured greetings that constantly marked our passage through the burying ground.

When we had made the rounds we sat down upon the edge of the flag-dressed platform, and he proceeded to explain what I already had begun to reason out myself—only, of course, I did not know, till he told me, how it had started.

"It has been a good many months now," he said, "since we dug the first grave here. But on the day of the funeral a delegation of the most influential residents came to me to say that the people of the town desired to adopt our dead. I asked just what exactly was meant by this, and then the spokesman explained: 'scarcely a family in this place where we live that has not given one or more of its members to die for France. In most cases these dead of ours sleep on battlefields far away from us, perhaps in unmarked and unknown graves. This is true of all parts of our country, but particularly is it true of this town, which is so remote from the scenes of actual fighting.'"

"So, in the case of this brave American who today is to be buried here among us, we ask that a French family shall be permitted formally to undertake the care of his grave, as though it were the grave of one of their own flesh and blood who has fallen, as he has fallen, for France and for freedom. In the case of each American who may hereafter be buried here we ask the same privilege. We promise you that, so long as these Americans shall rest here in our land, their graves shall be our graves, and will be tended as we tend the graves of our own sons."

"We desire that the name of each family that adopts a grave may be registered, so that, should the adults die, the children of the next generation, as a sacred charge, may carry on the obligation which is now to be laid upon their parents and transmitted as a legacy to all who bear their name. We would make sure of this, so that, no matter how long your fallen braves rest in the soil of France, their graves shall not be as the neglected graves of strangers to us, but, symbolically at least, may be as the graves of our dead sons."

"We wish to do these things for more reasons than one. We wish to do them because thereby we may express in our own small, poor way the gratitude we feel to America. We wish to do them because of the thought that some stricken mother across the seas in America will perhaps feel a measure of comfort and consolation in knowing the grave of her boy shall always be made beautiful by the hands of a French woman whose home, also, has been desolated. And finally we wish to do them because we know it will bring peace to the hearts of Frenchwomen to feel they have a right to put French flowers upon the graves of your heroic dead, since they can never hope—most of them—to perform that same office for theirs."

A BEAUTIFUL TRIBUTE

The general cleared his voice, which had grown a bit husky. Then he continued:

"So that was how the thing came about; but it doesn't altogether explain what you see happening here today. You see, the French have no day that exactly corresponds in its spiritual significance to our Decoration Day—our Memorial Day. All Souls' Day, which is religious rather than patriotic in its purpose is their nearest approach to it. But weeks ago, before the services contemplated today, were even announced, the word somehow spread among the townspeople. To my own knowledge, some of these poor women have been denying themselves the actual necessities of life in order to be able to make as fine a showing for the graves they have adopted as any of the wealthier sponsors could make."

"Don't think, though, that these graves are not properly kept at all times. Any day, at any hour, you can come here and you will find anywhere from ten to fifty women down on their knees smoothing the turf and freshening the flowers they constantly keep upon the graves. But I know that at daylight this morning all or nearly all of them would be here, doing their work before the crowds began to arrive for the services, and I wanted you to see them at it, in the hope that you might write something about the sight for our people at home to read. If it helps them to understand better what is in the hearts of the French you and I may count this time as having been well spent."

He stood up, looking across the cemetery all bathed and burished as it was in the soft, rich summer sunshine.

"God!" he said under his breath. "How I am learning to love these people!"

So I have here set down the tale; and to it I must add a sequel: Decoration Day was months ago, and now I learn that the custom which originated in this coast town is spreading throughout the country; and that, in many villages and towns where Americans are buried, Frenchwomen whose sons or husbands or fathers or brothers have been killed are taking over the care of the graves of Americans, bestowing upon them the same loving attention they would visit, if they could, upon the graves of their men-folk.—Irvin S. Cobb in Saturday Evening Post.

NO ROOM IN THE INN

Footsore and weary, Mary tried some rest to find; but was denied, "There is no room," the blind ones cried.

Meekly the Virgin turned away, No voice entreating her to stay; There was no room for God that day.

No room for her, round whose tired feet Angels bowed in transport sweet, The Mother of their Lord to greet;

No room for Him, in whose small hand The troubled sea and mighty land Lie cradled like a grain of sand.

No room, O Babe Divine, for Thee, That Christmas night; and even we Dare shut our hearts and turn the key.

In vain Thy pleading Baby-cry Strikes our deaf souls, we pass Thee by, Unsheltered 'neath the wintry sky.

No room for God; O Christ, that we Should bar our doors, nor e'er see The Saviour waiting patiently.

Fling wide the doors. O Christ, turn back: Of light and warmth a total lack

How can I bid Thee enter here, Amid the desolation drear Of lukewarm love and craven fear?

What bleaker shelter can there be Than my poor heart's tepidity? Chilled, wind-tossed as the wintry sea?

Dear Lord, I shrink from Thy pure eye: No home to offer Thee have I. Yet in Thy Mercy, pass not by.

—AGNES REPPLIER.

THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM

"O cruel manger, how bleak, how bleak; For the limbs of the Babe, my God; Soft little limbs on the cold, cold straw; Weep, O eyes, for thy God."

"Bitter ye winds in the frosty night Upon the Babe, my God. Piercing the torn and broken thatch; Lament, O heart, for thy God."

"Bare is the floor, how bare, how bare, For the Babe's sweet Mother, my God. Only a stable for Mother and Babe How cruel thy world, my God!"

"The shepherds have come from the hills to adore The Babe in the manger, my God; Mary and Joseph welcome them there; Worship, O soul, thy God!"

"But I alone may not come near The Babe in the manger, my God. Weep for thy sin, O heart, and plead With Mary, the Mother of God!"

"May I not come, oh, just to the door, To see the Babe, my God? There will I stop, and kneel and adore, And weep for my sins, O God!"

"But Mary smiles, and rising up, In her arms the Babe, my God; She comes to the door and bends her down, With the Babe in her arms, my God!"

"Her sinless arms in my sinful arms Place the Babe, my God; 'He has come to take thy sins away; Break, O heart, for thy God.'"

—CONDE B. PALLLEN.

CATHOLICS AND NEAR CATHOLICS

The Newark Monitor has a vivid picture of those who may be termed near-Catholics. The Monitor says:

There are Catholics and we are sorry to say, there are near-Catholics. There are Catholics who are Catholics in every fiber of their being. The chords of their heart thrill and vibrate with the spirit of Catholicity. They are Catholic in faith, in obedience, in opinion, in word and deed. They are dutiful children of the Church. They attend Mass every Sunday; they frequent the sacraments; they are present at the devotions; they send their children to the parish school; they contribute to the support of their parish church; they are members of the parish societies; their lives are humble, straight, upright Catholic lives. Their lives make melody in the sight of God; their death is an entrance to the

music of heaven. But alas! there are near-Catholics. There are men and women who were born Catholics, who received into their keeping the precious jewel of the Faith. But they have grown away from the Church. They are Catholics merely in name. Catholics by a vague tradition which is not strong enough even to touch them with remorse.

They were cold and indifferent as they grew up. Perhaps, indeed, their home was far from Catholic, and their home life soon became the arid naturalism of those around them. They remained away from Mass at will; they did not even trouble to seek the shadow of a reason. The Mass meant little to them. They went to Confession at long and accidental intervals, which gradually lengthened into years. They knew not the state of the Heavenly Bread; they were satisfied with the husks of the swine. They early sought Protestant society, and of course entered a mixed marriage.

Years came and went and they were swept into the coldest indifference. Their children grew up around them untrained in the faith. The snows of age fell, and they stood facing death. Even then there was delay in sending for the priest. They were near Catholics and the thought of the priest was forcing itself through the barrier of the years. They hesitated to propose their desire to those around them. They grew weaker and weaker. A priest was hurriedly summoned. There was a halting confession. It is difficult to gather up the broken and confused threads in a few agitated moments. The curse of their careless life is upon their dying hours. They trust in the magic of mechanical Sacraments. God has surrounded His Sacraments with conditions. They produce grace where there are no obstacles. And Oh! the obstacle of years of sin and indifference! The obstacle of spiritual impotence begotten of the faithless life.

He is dead. The near-Catholic stands before the judgment seat of God. The requiem is sung. Some of the children—aye, some of the children—sit through the solemn ceremonial of the Mass. The dead man has left behind him dead branches.—Catholic Bulletin.

WHY DO BELLS FOR CHRISTMAS RING?

Why do bells for Christmas ring? Why do little children sing? Once a lovely shining star, Seen by wise men from afar Gently moved until its light Made a manger cradle bright: There a darling Baby lay, Pilled soft upon the hay, And its mother sang and smiled, "This is Christ, the Holy Child." Therefore bells for Christmas ring; Therefore little children sing.

—EUGENE FIELD.

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