

GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US

A Blind Man Cured at Lourdes

[From "La Verite," Paris, October, 1897.—Translated for The Catholic Register.]

Mr. Louis COLIN, a member of our editorial staff, sends us from Lourdes the following narrative, written for The Journal, which records all the wonderful cures obtained at the grotto.

It is the simple story of a poor wandering ballad singer who was compelled, owing to the loss of his eyesight, to adopt that means of supporting himself and his young family, and who, after years of ceaseless prayer and acts of resignation, at length obtained a cure.

It is a most touching tale, and should be widely made known, for the glory of Our Lady of Lourdes, who inspires her devout clients, even when they happen to be the poorest of the poor, with such admirable sentiments. How otherwise than by the power and strength of the virtue of faith can we account for the fact that not even the utmost stress of suffering and want can deprive the most wretched of human beings of his boundless confidence, nay his preternatural contentment!

The following is Mr. Colin's most striking narrative:

Alfred Aubert was born at Chatillon-Sur-Indre, of a devout Christian family, as he himself tells us. His mother used to tell him often that amidst the trials of life, "Dieu est toujours là"—God is always with us.

When he had reached the proper age he learned the trade of a tanner and leather curer, which trade he would have continued to follow to this day, were it not that at the age of twenty-eight, when in the flower of his manhood and filled with anticipations of future happiness and but recently married, he underwent one of the most awful trials that can befall a man here below.

Tanners make use of vast tanks or vats of water in which they put tanbark, and in order to expedite the operation they add a quantity of nitric acid. Aubert had emptied many a carboy of acid into the vats in his time, but a day came never to be forgotten, when he felt that the glass vessel containing the acid was slipping through the wicker-work cover which he held up the handles. He quickly stooped forward to take hold of the bottle, but was too late; it struck the ground, and the spray penetrated his eyes. The poor fellow at once strove to plunge his head into the water, but the bark floating on the surface rendered this impossible. His attempts to remove the burning fluid, by wiping his eyes with his hands, only made the action of the acid more severe. Both eyes were affected and the young man was plunged into the gloomy darkness of night which was to hold in its grasp for years a once happy family, father and mother and helpless babes. Farewell to the bright sunlight, to beautiful nature and farewell to honest and fruitful toil forever!

This disaster occurred in the year 1883, at Moulin-Eugibert, in the department of Nièvre. Medical aid was promptly secured, but did not restore light to the sightless orbs, the case was entirely hopeless. All that could be done was to soothe and subdue the burning pain. But what was to become of the family? They were poor and depended on the work of their hands for their daily bread. Aubert found himself a burthen on those whom his toil had hitherto supported, in fact he had become almost a burthen to himself.

He decided to take shelter with his own people at Bourdeau-les-Bouches. By this means he ceased to be a charge upon his poor wife, and she had then but her self and her child to provide for. The local oculist, Dr. Guepin, was consulted and declared that nothing more could be done. Medical science cannot restore sight to the blind. And however great the loss may be to the poor patient, science cannot work miracles in his behalf.

Nevertheless, after a close and most careful examination the doctor decided to operate on the eye he considered to have been the least injured. The operation did not succeed. The eye sunk under the scalpel and disappeared wholly beneath the closed lids. The other remained as it was, dull and lightless and lost. In the middle of the pupil was a prominent milky point which evidenced the obnubilation of the orb. The sight was gone, gone forever!

In the course of his long and dreary watchings and the awful solitude in which he was plunged, with his life broken while he was yet in the flower of manhood, a thousand despairing thoughts filled his mind. But after much reflection he determined to go back to his wife, who had by that time removed into L'Allier. It occurred to him that as he knew a few popular songs he might as well try and provide for himself and his family by singing in the streets and on the highways, his wife accompanying him and giving him the help of her arm.

"When I got back to my wife and child," he said, "I made application through the local doctor, for a license as a travelling ballad-singer. My request was at once granted, and I started out on my way."

I had a fairly good voice, and could sing a few popular ballads. At first the work fatigued me greatly, but I soon got accustomed to it. For fourteen years I wandered thus over seven or eight of the Departments, and in particular those of the centre of France—Ardennes, Seine-et-Marne, Marne, Rhone, Loire-et-Cher, etc. I was enabled at last to purchase a donkey and a little covered cart to sleep in at night. For I must tell you, that in the begin-

ning, the first years, we many a time slept out in the snow and wind, under the trees or in the shelter of a few boards, when we had no other shelter.

Here Alfred Aubert went at the recollection of all these things, and continued as follows: A second child was born to us, and shelter must be found for it, and then it was that with God's help I succeeded in securing a "baby carriage."

But how did you stand the work of singing all day?

When I got tired I used to take to my beads in order to earn the compassion of the public. I cannot describe to you all the persecution brought down upon me by my poor rosary on the part of my fellow-beggars. Some of them displayed their sore or crippled legs or arms; I showed my eyes and my rosary. They used to be furious when the people coming out of church on Sundays would search their pockets before their eyes and then drop the pennies into my hand. Then would they break out in coarse abuse and threats against me. My only answer was to tell them to do as I did: "Pray, pray, as I do, and the alms will come for you too." "But," he said, "I am telling you too much; I promise I would never tell about my life, on account of the sufferings and trials I have had."

"Here, for the second time, Alfred Aubert broke down and sobbed. "You see," he said, "it chokes me to speak of it. The fact is, I should not say anything about it, since I have made my resignation."

"What do you mean by your resignation?" "Yes, my resignation. That is connected with a circumstance I can never forget, never, as long as I live! I was in the Department of the Rhone, with my donkey, my dog, my poor wife and children. It had been snowing and the cold was intense. My hands stuck to the wheels of the cart when I strove to help the poor beast by pushing as well as I could. In the morning my fortune consisted of two or three cents and a piece of dry bread. I stopped to rest at the chief town of the locality. I have forgotten the name, but it begins with 'T'. It was on a Sunday, just before Mass. I was standing, with my poor little family, half frozen on the public highway, and I had my rosary in my hand, when I was accosted by two gendarmes, who ordered me to move on, saying: 'Beggings is for hidden here and throughout the Department; move on at once or we shall lay hands on you.'"

"The parish priest of the locality, who was a witness to the scene, and had noticed my rosary, at once came to my rescue, saying: 'The man is not begging; he is praying, you cannot interfere with him.' Thereupon the people who were about to attend Mass, hearing what had been said, gathered around me, and, cent by cent, made up for me a fifteen francs. We were saved for the time."

"But my troubles were yet far from being ended. We had to set out once more. On the following day, after several hours of tramping over snow and icy roads, we succeeded in reaching the foot of Mont Sauvage. We were truly then in a plight overcome by fatigue; and feeling myself to be alone and forsaken by men, I and mine knelt down on the snow. My wife wept like a Magdalen beside me. She was more overcome than I was. Not knowing how to escape from our woes, I prayed and prayed! And when I had well prayed, I made my resignation."

How was that? I said to our good God that I left all in His hands, and that He could not forsake me! Then turning to my poor wife, who was sobbing, with her hands covering her face, I said to her: 'Take courage, wife, with patience and suffering we shall get out of our present trouble. My mother always used to say to me: 'In time of trouble we must pray, God is always with us! Did you not see it for yourself yesterday in front of the Church? Take courage then!'

"The day was far spent when utterly overcome with fatigue and suffering we managed to reach the house of a poor family, who were the instruments of Providence for our rescue. They unharassed our little donkey and put him into the stable, and we ourselves took refuge in the outbuildings. In the morning early the good people comforted us with a drink of hot wine and sent us rejoicing on our way."

But, said I to the poor ballad-singer: You must have had many strange adventures in your wandering life?

"Yes, sir, but I have promised never to narrate them."

Here the poor fellow broke down again and wept at the thought of the terrible days he had gone through. He then went on, in broken accents as follows:

"But Providence did not forsake me nevertheless. Oh, I thank God, I assure you, with all my heart, and I can never sufficiently thank him. One day—long after what I have just told you—I was at Blandy-les-Tours, in Seine-et-Marne. I had then, sir, four children and nothing, not one penny in my pocket to buy them food with. As a last resource we all took to prayer. We said the rosary together and then the memorare. At the close of our prayer, and in fact before it was ended, a priest came to the door of the wagon. He had heard of us praying. I had been at Mass that day also and he had seen us. Holding out his hand he gave me a piece of silver, saying: 'Here, friend, this is the fruit of prayer.' Not satisfied with this he also himself brought us a bottle of wine and some bread. That day the hand of Providence was stretched forth to aid me once more, and has never failed me since."

The reverend gentleman from that time took a deep interest in our welfare. After he had heard something of what I

have told you, he took every possible means to rescue us from our misery. It would be impossible for me to tell all the kindness I have received at his hands. He secured for me the countenance and aid of a charitable person, who undertook to help me. I was provided with an humble home, whence I sallied forth from time to time to earn my living. I hardly ever sing now, but I said my beads almost without ceasing.

In many places I became known as "L'ange qui prie"—the praying blind man. In the department of Seine-et-Marne, I was known as the "Praying-man of Neuvy."

But how did you manage to come to Lourdes?

Simply through the kindness of my benefactors. One day this summer (1897) when I was at Maubert-Fontaine with my eldest boy I got a letter—for my wife always knew my whereabouts—a letter informing me that I was to go to Lourdes.

"I was told at the same time that I must produce a medical certificate testifying to my blindness. I went to the doctor forthwith. He made a lengthy examination of my left eye and then gave me his certificate. I forwarded the letter to my benefactor, by whom it was to be sent on to Lourdes."

"The day of the national pilgrimage came on, and I was put on the train with the Orleans pilgrims and got here under the care of that gentleman, whom I now see before me, who provided me with all I needed during the journey. He gave me food and drink and assisted me in every manner."

Did you think you would be cured?

Yes, sir, that thought was in my heart. I reached Lourdes on Friday, the 20th August. The day passed without my feeling anything unusual. But it was very different on Saturday, the 21st. I was led to the grotto by Masson (Masson, who always walked beside him, was a lame pilgrim with crutches) and received holy communion about half-past eight o'clock, after which I knelt down on my stick, which I had laid down crosswise. Do you mean that stick alongside your bed?

Yes, sir. It is a very knotty stick and it must be a hard penance to kneel on it!

Quite true, sir, but we must not look for comfort. Suffering is the way to success. I had bent down during the first moments of my thanksgiving. When the knots became too painful under my knees I got up, but continued to pray. I had just reached the Memoire when something like a cloud appeared to me, and in the cloud, or mist, I distinguished, quite close to me, the Blessed Virgin in white. She almost touched my face I could not tell where I was. I thought I was going to lose my senses.

"What occurred afterwards, until I left the grotto, I could not really say. It seemed to me that I walked a few paces, that I was struck on the arm when the sick arrived, and that a lady put questions to me. Then, when I got back to the Gave, in the midst of the people, I felt as if I was waking out of a dream. The sky, the fields and the river, all seemed to be in motion before me."

"I began to weep, and as you see I cannot help weeping still at the mere telling of what occurred. I had asked the Blessed Virgin that I might be able to go about without help, and now I can see perfectly well; she has granted me far more than I had asked for. When I got as far as the door of the pilgrims' quarters, my companions realized what had happened. They exclaimed: 'You are cured, you are cured!' and I wept with joy and many of them wept with me, and gave thanks to our Lady of Lourdes."

The touching little story of poor Aubert was now nearing its conclusion. He told it with such manifest sincerity and simplicity that I was myself deeply moved. However, before leaving the ballad singer, I put to him a last question: I will publish, I said, the story of your cure. I can do it and give your name and address or without giving either the one or the other. If I give your address kind friends may send you help. But otherwise, no one will think of you. What do you say?

Without a moment's hesitation, he answered:

"No, not my name. I want to stay quietly at home, where I shall find work and provide for my family. Providence did not forsake me when I was blind, it will not be more likely to forsake me now after restoring to me my eyesight. God is always with us!"

Thereupon I parted from the happy recipient of Mary's favors and went to see others who had been equally blest.

I met him again afterwards on the banks of the Gave. He was leading by the arm another blind man. I was informed afterwards that the latter had also obtained a cure, at the last moment. Both of them will now be in a position to enlighten others along the roadway of life, where many are so blind as not to acknowledge the miraculous power of God and see not with the eyes of the soul the name of Jesus Christ written in letters dazzling as the sun over the Grotto of Lourdes.

Louis Colin, before handing in the story of the Aubert cure for publication, took the precaution of writing to Abbé Le Guillon, whose name is mentioned above, in order to secure his testimony in the matter. The Rev. Abbé's reply is so complete and so touching that we must lay it before our readers:

LES LILAS, (Seine),
Sept. 27th, 1897.

DEAR MONS. COLIN.—I am happy to be in a position to reply in the affirmative to all questions you have submitted in relation to Alfred Aubert and to testify to the truth of everything he has told you.

Let me tell you how it was, that I first became acquainted with that worthy citizen and excellent Christian.

It occurred in the last day of October just five years ago, at about half-past eight in the evening. I was then a parish priest of the commune of Blandy-les-Tours in the diocese of Meaux. My presbytery was located at some distance from the church, and I went as usual to see that all the doors were properly closed and fastened. When crossing the little space in front of the church I noticed a small covered cart of the most wretched description which had come to a stand

there. On approaching I heard the voice of a man praying aloud and children's voices responding.

It was impossible for them to know of my presence, and the darkness was such as to prevent my being recognized. It was evidently some family in great distress, but doubtless a family of pious Christians.

On the following morning I went to see them. I found that the father was stone blind. There were three young children (there are now four) all sickly and delicate. The poor mother seemed to me to be in consumption.

My heart was grieved at the sight of such misery. I cannot venture to describe their wretched condition. A wisp of straw was their only bed.

I took immediate steps for the relief of the poor family as far as it was in my power to help them, and I have not abandoned them since. In order to be in a position to assist them more effectively I made them take up their abode in my parish. Many times during the year I used to make them all come to my house, it is so sweet to share a crust with those poorer than ourselves. I was thus, time and again, in a position to know that Aubert was utterly blind, but also found him full of faith and resignation under his affliction to a degree that really edified me. Some of my charitable parishioners, to whom I had appealed in his behalf, are prepared to bear out my statements, and to testify that Aubert was undoubtedly blind.

He earned his bread and that of his family by appealing to public charity. He used to sing from door to door. But his main reliance was in praying openly at the doors of the churches at the various places of pilgrimage, to which he loved to resort. I learned that his fellow beggars used to call him the Prayer.

When I first knew him he told me he had already been blind for nine years. That was five years ago, so that he has been blind for fourteen years.

I succeeded in inducing an excellent and most fervent Christian lady to take an interest in his fate. She went so far as to place at his disposal a small house and garden plot in the commune of Bordeaux les Bouches. This most worthy person, whose name is Marie Baudet, is also a resident of that commune. It was that lady and your humble servant who decided that Aubert should perform a pilgrimage to Lourdes, confidently trusting that through the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Lady of Lourdes, he would return with his prayer granted and a perfect cure.

We have not been disappointed by the result, and our confidence in the ineffable goodness of Mary Immaculate, the consolation of the afflicted, has not been in vain.

The subject of this miracle, poor Aubert, appeared to you to be in a state of exaltation and emotion, and, in fact, beside himself! But what else could you expect! Fancy recovering your sight after fourteen years of blindness!

He came running to me to tell me of his happiness, and to offer thanks with us to God and to our holy and merciful Mother. He remained five days at my house, and I must say that I never wearied of seeing him and marvelling at the wonderful miracle really operated in his behalf. His eye is clear and limpid and he sees perfectly well. Our Lady of Lourdes has done her work in an admirable manner.

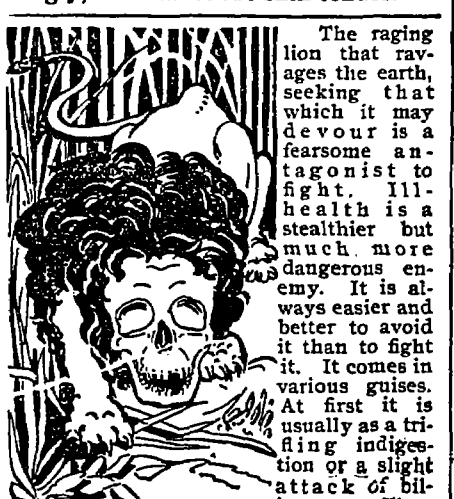
His return to Bordeaux les Bouches, where he has been living for a year, and where every one knew him to be blind, directly from Lourdes on recovering his eyesight, was a perfect ovation.

My excellent friend, the parish priest, gave him a public reception and feast, and joined with him in giving public thanks to Our Lady of Lourdes. I assure you, on my conscience and before God, of the exact truth of all I have now told you. And I consent, or rather I ask, that you may make use of it as you think best for the honor of Our Lady and to promote confidence in her admirable goodness.

Your devoted servant,
LE GUILLON.

A preacher was being shaved by a barber who had evidently become unnerved by the previous night's dissipation. Finally he cut the preacher's chin. The latter looked up at the artist reproachfully, and said: "You see, my man, what comes of hard drinking."

"Yes, sir," replied the barber, consolingly, "it makes the skin tender."



The raging lion that ravages the earth, seeking that which it may devour is a fearsome antagonist to fight. It is a healthful and a stealthy but much more dangerous enemy. It is always easier and better to avoid it than to fight it. It comes in various guises. At first it is usually as a trifling indisposition or a slight attack of biliousness. Then follow loss of appetite, or headache, or nervousness and sleeplessness, or stupor. These are the advance heralds of consumption, malaria, nervous exhaustion and prostration, and a multitude of other ills.

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CATHOLIC EDUCATION.

His Eminence Cardinal Vaughan Issues a Letter in Connection With the London School Board Elections.

In a recent letter, His Eminence Cardinal Vaughan, gives the following clear and concise statement in regard to the question of Catholic education and its administration. The letter was issued in connection with the elections for School Board representatives for London, Eng. His Eminence writes:—

"As you have asked my advice in reference to the School Board Election, I lay before you the following principles, which I think contain sufficient guidance for the present occasion:—

"1. No system of Public Elementary education is acceptable for the training of Catholic children but such as is distinctly and frankly Catholic. The Catholic demand is, Catholic education given by competent Catholic teachers to Catholic children. If the State insists upon educating the children of the country, it is bound at the same time to respect the inalienable natural right of parents and their offering in the matter of religion."

"2. No instruction in partial Christianity, no form of Christianity other than the Catholic, can be accepted by Catholics for their children. Better a thousand times purely secular instruction, supplemented as best may be elsewhere, than unsound and faulty instruction in the truths of Christianity."

"3. As Catholics are not expected to support the various non-Catholic Missionary Societies that seek to evangelise the heathen, so neither can they be expected to support any of the non-Catholic methods by which it is sought to evangelise the Board schools."

"4. At the same time, Catholics who stand for the liberty of the subject will do wisely to demand that School Boards shall recognize the right of all parents to have their children instructed in their own religion and in no other, and this even during school hours, if it can be so arranged. School Boards are necessary and must be maintained; but they ought not to have the power to override a parental right directly affecting the religion of the children."

"So far as Catholics are concerned, it will be distinctly understood that the limitation of religious education to the mere teaching of a Catechism, either within or without the Board school premises, is a compromise that will never satisfy the Catholic demand for an education that shall be fully and frankly Catholic."

"A compromise, indeed, may sometimes be accepted as the less of two evils, for instance, where no Catholic school is possible; and in such a case a school Board ought not to have power to refuse it."

"5. The main objects before Catholics in sending members to the School Board, and serving upon it themselves, are these:—To protect the interests and rights, especially of the Catholic part of the population, to see that Voluntary

schools be not hindered, injured, or destroyed by the action of the Boards; to secure that the Board schools be conducted with due regard to the rights and liberties of all, to public economy, and to efficiency in secular instruction. "I hope these points may help to decide your course in the coming election."

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