

The Priest and the Prisoner.

(By R. M. Clarkson, in N. Y. Freeman's Journal.)

Sacramento, Cal.

Editor, The Freeman's Journal:

I have long known the facts upon which the following story is based, but have hesitated to publish them, because I have been told that they might not be regarded as worth the space they would require. But the space, while recuperating from a long illness, I have thought that the publication of the circumstances will do no harm, but on the contrary may tend to cause a reflection on the great danger of dependence on an eleventh hour or "death bed" repentance. I am personally cognizant of all the details that are herein related, having been told of them by one of the priests ministering in the first instance, and by the brother-in-law of the man in the second story, besides personally knowing the penitent himself after he came to live at Sacramento.

As to the child's recovery I knew all the family, and have the facts spoken of from the child's grandfather in person.

R. M. CLARKSON.

THE PRIEST AND THE PRISONER.

Doubtless stories similar to the following have been read before in Catholic papers, as "terrible examples" to the negligent, and as cogent reasons why the sinner should not presume too long on the possibilities of "death-bed" repentance. But as the facts and circumstances herein set forth have come under the purview of my own personal knowledge, I have thought they may be worthy of publication and perusal if only because of the narrow chance the subjects had of that final consolation which the faithful are taught from infancy to know is the crowning blessing of the departing Christian soul.

In both cases under consideration it will be seen the unhappy men had longed and hoped for something they feared would never come, or if it came, too late to be of any avail to them, which came, nevertheless, in the very moment when a vital spark was about to be extinguished and then, for the first time in a long life, all appeared to be contentment and peace.

One summer's day, late in the afternoon, as I was about to close my office, Father H. entered. I omit his name, as he is absent from the State and I cannot make it public without his permission. He is the pastor of a large parish in the interior and Chaplain of one of the State Prisons, including the parish. He took a seat and we began to chat, as we have been well acquainted for a long time, and he is always interesting. I noticed that he was warm and fatigued, and on my part he informed me he had just returned from a long drive to and from the prison, forty-eight miles altogether, since morning. His story was as follows:

A few weeks before, he had heard of one of the prisoners, a young man, who had been taken to the prison hospital suffering from some complaint that doubtless meant an early death; that he was, or should be a Catholic.

Father H. called to see him and realized that the prisoner-patient was a physical wreck. He was willing enough to listen to encouraging words as to possible recovery, etc., but to no suggestion of spiritual aid or assistance would he give the least heed, though admitting he was born a Catholic and educated in that faith.

Even the slightest hint to direct his mind toward the life to come seemed to irritate and annoy him, and he made no attempt to conceal the fact that he preferred any other topic of conversation.

The priest visited him often, and in time learned from him and from others of the prisoners and officers that the man's career had been a hard, a sensational one; that he had long been a criminal, though yet young in years. He had been a prisoner before for other felonies; but now had a life-sentence to serve for the highest crime on the statutes, and for which he barely escaped the hangman's halter through the influential power of his family's friends and the leniency of a Governor who had hesitated dangerously near the hour of execution.

At last, peace and quiet from the excitement of his dissipated life, hard labor in the rock-crusher, and mayhap, the awakening of that conscience so long stilled and dormant, caused his tortured nature to rebel. The worn system drooped, the palized strength refused to respond to the laborious exactions of the inexorable demands of the law of the State, hard, wearying and wearying work to which he had ever been a

stranger soon told on him, and hasty reluctant consumption claimed him for an early, dishonored grave on the side of the bleak hill just beyond the walls.

His crimes had driven his parents to that peace and rest they could not know on earth after they had lived long enough to save their boy from the rope at the sacrifice of their small fortune and no other was left to mourn his fate.

The Chaplain after heroic effort was only able to secure from this despondent victim of a life of crime the response that he did not wish to be moved about religion simply because he sincerely did not feel that there was any hope for him beyond the grave. He had been in the prison long enough to think and ponder over the life he had led, of the crimes he had committed without cause, but especially the last, and most horrible of all that had no justification; the brutal, cold-blooded murder of a helpless, defenseless old man for the money he hoped to secure and which his victim did not have. To add to the awful horror, was the fact that the man he had murdered was a close bosom friend of the prisoner's father and family from whom he had often had the best of advice and offers of assistance. The thoughts of this special crime often haunted him. At the midnight hour he could see that old, gray head leaning over, pity and sorrow depicted on the murdered features, and they all but drove him to insanity. No, there was no mercy for him, and indeed he felt that he must die and be buried forever in hell as the only fit compensation for that devilish deed.

Do what he might, argue and attempt to persuade as he would, cite examples of those whose errors were as heinous and still repeated yet it was the same, sole reply: "Father, it is useless; I like you to call and talk to me, but when you talk of religion, of salvation, you only annoy and worry me. I would, therefore, prefer that you would not call at all if you must persist in talking of hope and of saving a soul already damned."

Father H. said it was after such an interview, the day before, that he left the prisoner in the hospital cell. Before leaving he could easily see the man was rapidly growing worse which fact was confirmed by the physician. So the priest told him how he might be reached by phone should his services be required.

"This morning," concluded Father H., "I was surprised to receive a call on the telephone at an unusually early hour saying I was wanted at the prison immediately. I hurried to the lively stable, secured a fast team, and in a little over two hours was at the bed of that dying criminal. He was in possession of his faculties, and I never saw in human countenance the picture of more perfect gratitude and anxiety; gratitude that he had survived till I arrived and anxiety for the opportunity of making his peace with his Maker. His voice was firm and his manner fixed, evidence of a determined mind to accomplish. He informed me that since my last visit he had thought deep and long on the situation, that he had prayed to God for aid if there was any hope for such an abandoned wretch as I had told him there was; that after all I had said to him, he was afraid to die without seeing me again. I put on my stole and sat by his side.

Never did human heart open wider, more fully, more sincerely, more contritely than did that one to me this morning as he poured out his whole past life amid the most piteous and pitiful wailing I had ever heard, as if he cared not did the entire living world know his long history of iniquities. When through he fell to his pillow exhausted, begging to know if there could yet be hope for such a soul as his. When he had rested a few moments I sought to comfort and cheer him and, as the doctor had told me on my arrival that the man could live but a short time, I administered the last sacraments and prepared him for death.

With my eyes bent over the book I began to read the Office for the Dead. When for the first time I looked into his face with the "Amen" still trembling on my lips that man with the merest sigh closed his eyes in death.

Yes, I am fatigued after the ride and experiences of the day, but, oh, what priest would not be in such a cause? At times I almost feared he would persist and hold out in his despondency till it would be too late."

NOT QUITE TOO LATE.

One day after lunch at my restaurant one of the proprietors, an old-time friend, took me aside and informed me that his brother-in-law, a native of Switzerland, and an old man, who resided in one of the suburbs of the city, was very sick, that he, the speaker, had just been out to see him; that the old man was a Catholic, but had not been in a church for forty or fifty years and that in his talk that morning, he, the informant, had spoken of having a priest call to see him, to which the ailing man had positively and firmly objected. When it was persisted in he suggested that it be deferred till Monday as the clergy were too busy on Saturday. (Our conversation was on Friday and the younger man had promised to take a priest there the next day, Saturday.) He asked my advice as to which of the priests in the city it was best to take, and I suggested

the oldest of the Franciscan Fathers, a German, as that was the native language of both.

The next day, at about the same hour I was again in the restaurant for lunch. After the meal the same proprietor with whom I had spoken the day before took a seat at my table and we being alone began on the topic of his relative's condition. He was in a happy frame of mind as I could readily see by the smile that lit his countenance as he related his story, and not without reason, as the sequel will reveal.

According to his fixed determination he had that very morning called with his buggy on Father —, of the Franciscan Order and taken him to the house of his relative from which he himself had just returned within the last half hour. He informed me that after the formality of introduction he left the priest sitting at the bed-side of the patient who had for weeks been a victim of dropsy in its most virulent form. They were together for what seemed a space of two hours. Then the old Franciscan opened the door and called the others of the family into the room. There the sick man lay, crying like an infant, and the young man who related these facts assured me the tears rushed to his own eyes as he and the others dropped to their knees by the side of the bed.

Taking the hand of his young brother-in-law, the older man thanked and assured him he was the cause of bringing him the first real joy and peace of mind he had known for many many years; that though he had often seemed to be a contented and happy man in life yet it was but assumed for though he had been strictly raised in the Catholic Church by his good mother in Switzerland, after he came out here he had cast aside all thought of religion in the anxious greed for wealth till he entirely neglected his Church and long years ago lost all thought of his duty to God and had not known what it was to enter a church door.

Still, there was, however, and at all times, whatever his life had been, some unseen yet ever present power that never ceased telling him he was not living as he should; that he would never realize true happiness till he changed his course of living, till he returned to the path on which his good mother had first directed his young footsteps, back in the highlands of his native country. And now, as he was about to leave the world, a feeling of horror had seized him and though he felt he needed a helping hand he did not know how to ask for it till in the opportune moment his relative had brought the priest to his assistance.

"It was most gratifying to see this man, in his day so strong, so robust and lively, now lying there in perfect contentment, apparently satisfied, and happy, after that long interview with the priest. He was more like a child who had been made happy by the gift of a coveted toy. He could not find the proper terms with which to express his gratitude to the Father."

As the restaurant man concluded his story the phone at the desk rang. Turning to me he said: "Judge, the old man has just died; they had prepared some refreshments and were taking it to him when they saw he was dying. He passed away as quietly and smiling as a child dropping to sleep."

STRANGE.

Does it not seem strange that the man who can spend dollars for drinks and cigars every day in the week cannot find ten cents for religion on Sunday?

That the woman who can describe all the new hats and dresses at church cannot see the almsbox, no matter how large?

That the man who never gives a cent to the church fund always finds the most fault about the manner in which it is distributed?

That the pastor who does his full duty to God is unpopular with many of his parishioners?

That people will pay high prices for a seat in the theatre, but always steal one in the church when they can?

That our young men will assume barroom attitudes at devotion and take on photographic postures in the parlors of their young lady friends?

That people will buy boxes and high-priced seats at a theatre when nothing could induce to rent a seat in church?

That persons who are always pressing their employers for larger salaries expect their pastors to live on good wishes and the grace of God?

That parents who never attend their religious duties expect their children to become model Christians?

That many of the men who worship in the rear of the church and block the entrance are always found in the front seats at places of amusement?

for an airing. Patiently, devotedly, would he trundle that little human freight over squares of the city until both would return fatigued to their humble home. One of the favorite spots the old gentleman liked to visit was the Convent of the Sisters of Mary, where he and his helpless little charge had a friend in each one of the Sisters. Most every Sunday afternoon in good weather he was a welcome guest among them.

On the occasion of one of those calls and during the usual talk on the possibility of the child's recovery, one of the Sisters retired from his presence and soon returning handed him a very small vial; telling him it contained a little water from Lourdes that had been brought to them by a friend. She advised him to try it in behalf of the child; that if it did not prove of benefit, yet it could do no harm. She advised him to put only a drop or two in the child's food, from time to time, as it was scarce and precious. He took it with many thanks promising to act as told, at the same time smiling and giving his head a little shake of doubt. Still he determined to try and to recite the prayers enjoined by the Sisters. He began that night as the little fellow eat his evening meal.

This narrative is already long drawn out and I must get to the end. The old man, a conscientious, Christian soul, assured me he religiously and strictly continued to put a drop of the water now and then into some article of the child's meal and not at every meal least he exhaust the precious liquid too soon. In two or three weeks, he thought he noticed a change for the better in his child; it appeared to exhibit more life, became more vivacious and had a brighter appearance in all respects. In another week or more he was surprised one day to see the youngster making an effort to get out of his chair and he helped him to the floor, where he was able to stand by help of the chair! In fine the child took daily exercise standing and balancing by the chair till it was able to walk about the room for short excursions and brief periods. In the course of a short time he was permitted to make little trips into the yard and on the sidewalk where he had the aid of other children who rejoiced to do all in their power to welcome to the circle of their games and sports the little chap they had known for years to be so harshly afflicted and with whom they had so long sympathized and divided their good things, and whom they had so long visited in a kindly attempt to lessen his loneliness. At last he could trust himself on his feet and was on the high way to strength and vigor. To-day, says the happy grandfather, he is a boy among the boys of his age with every evidence that he is permanently cured.

If asked to account for the wonderful cure this old, happy, grateful man only answers, "God is good." To those who believe and feel the era of miracles has not yet passed he tells the story of the Water of Lourdes and smilingly asks: "Was it the Water?" Then answers his own question by "Who knows?"

WAS IT THE WATER CURE?

There is an old man living in Sacramento City who spends much of his time asking himself: "Was it the blessed water that did it?" Nor will he answer his own question affirmatively or negatively but contents himself with relating the facts in his possession and letting each one determine for himself. He is a conscientious, good old soul and a firm believer in all He teaches, for He can neither deceive nor be deceived.

The facts run thus: This old man, now many years down the west decline of life, had several sons and one daughter. The latter married happily and had one child, a little boy. When the little one was but a year and a half old the mother died, leaving the father to care for the infant. The grandfather took as much interest in its care as did the father, and with the aid of an old housekeeper, for the grandmother had died long before the daughter, the ill-favored babe did not want for the slightest attention.

The baby was unfortunately born, coming into the world burdened with spinal trouble which gave promise to be of permanent duration. The young, devoted father did not survive his wife very long, the grandfather thus inheriting the obligations of the cares and responsibilities of an attempt to supplant the places made vacant by the death of the youthful parents. The love the old man had divided between his daughter and son-in-law was now concentrated on and applied to the little, afflicted orphan. From its birth the skill of the most eminent physicians and surgeons of the city had been invoked in an effort to see what, if anything, could be done to effect a cure or relief. Still he continued in an unabated effort to do by science what nature had left in the professional world were consulted, all without hope. They could afford no relief, hold out no consolation for the future. The little one continued to sit in his high-chair at the table or crawl on the floor; nor did he ever complain, for it was his natural position in his waking hours. He had never known any other. But the good, the doing and devoted old grandfather was not despondent. He was ever with his precious charge when not at his labor. Every Sunday afternoon he took the helpless young fellow out in the baby carriage for exercise and

for an airing. Patiently, devotedly, would he trundle that little human freight over squares of the city until both would return fatigued to their humble home. One of the favorite spots the old gentleman liked to visit was the Convent of the Sisters of Mary, where he and his helpless little charge had a friend in each one of the Sisters. Most every Sunday afternoon in good weather he was a welcome guest among them.

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Tenders for Steel Plates and Shapes

TENDERS addressed to the undersigned at Ottawa and endorsed on the envelope "Tender for Steel Plates and Shapes, Sorel," will be received at the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Ottawa, up to noon of the SIXTH DAY OF APRIL NEXT, for the furnishing of about seven hundred and fifty tons of Steel Plates and Shapes required at the Government Shipyard at Sorel, P. Q.

Specifications and detailed information can be obtained from the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Ottawa, from Mr. G. J. Desbarats, Director of the Government Shipyard at Sorel, and from the Agent of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, Montreal, P.Q.

Each tender must be accompanied by an accepted cheque on a chartered bank, for the sum of \$1,500.00 to the order of the Minister of Marine and Fisheries. This cheque will be forfeited if the party whose tender is accepted declines to enter into a contract to deliver the Steel Plates and Shapes, or fails to carry out the contract. If the tender is not accepted the cheque will be returned. The Department does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender.

Newspapers copying this advertisement without authority from the Department will not be paid.

F. GOURDEAU.
Deputy Minister of Marine and Fisheries.
Department of Marine and Fisheries, Ottawa, Canada, 16th March, 1908.

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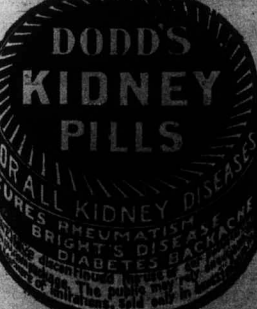
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