

Man and His Illusions

BY KONRAD KUEMMEL

(Continued)

Surprised, the schoolmaster got up and pleaded he was not prepared to speak, but that, as a service to his scattered brethren, he would do his best. He then began: "To have a church, to have regular Sunday services, how necessary is this if the faithful are not to lose their faith! There are many Catholic artisans who from the time of their apprenticeship have resided in the Capital, where for many years there had been no Mass at all, so that they have forgotten even the Commandments of the Church. Their non-Catholic friends and neighbors have assured them and they have gradually accepted the statement, that staying away from church on Sunday is nothing. A promised or an unexpected visit, a summer excursion, a business deal, a society celebration or anything similar, is considered a serious, an excusing pretext. Having worked all week, no one thinks it amiss to sleep late on Sunday.

All this would be changed if once they had their own little church, the bells of which on the Lord's day would summon the faithful from city and country to Holy Mass; most of them would heed the call, and their first love, the faith of their childhood, would again be kindled. How many were married by the preacher because there was no Catholic church near; how often did the priest, in spite of all haste, come too late to assist the injured and dying? In our very home, there was a case to the point; our servant-girl took sick suddenly and died before the priest arrived. Incessantly she cried if he had not yet come, and even after she had breathed her last her glazing eyes were still fixed on the door—never to the end of my life will I forget the terrible sight! And think of the benefit to the people if they had their own Catholic school? Many a family but for the absence of a school would have kept its children in the faith. How much I might tell of the mockery and the discrimination we as children were made to suffer at school. How often the very State Readers were quoted against us. I could go on indefinitely. It would be a great charity on part of the Chapter if it helped these 'dispersed ones' towards a church, a school and a resident priest. Think of your own children; think how they are looked after in that cozy, beautiful, trusted home, the parish school; towards such a home give a helping hand to the children of the Diaspora; God will reward you a thousand times.

The teacher was loudly acclaimed for his touching, timely words; that the pastor's proposition would be accepted was now a certainty. A few objections of the treasurer having been disposed of, the vote was called. With the exception of two, the plan suggested by the priest was carried. The objectors were the treasurer and the taverner. "The last shot is not yet fired," said the inn-keeper scoffingly to the former, as the pair was descending the council stairs.

3. Agnes.

"Till hushed my breath, I'll sigh, sweet Death, for thy far home! For in this world I'm sad and lone; Come soon, sweet Death!" These words a girl was singing in the rectory garden. Neither her temperament, however, nor her happy voice nor the surroundings of the little songstress, were of a kind to suggest such melancholy words. The blooming maid, upon whose countenance the untarnished, pure grace of childhood still open-

ing to fullness, thronged; who looked all the world in the face with ready, innocent eyes, did scant justice to the orphan "sad and lone," whose lament she was chanting. Nor did it contribute to the setting of her plaint, to see with what dexterity among a wilderness of flowers, she deftly fitted into a huge bouquet red and white roses, pinks, lilies, lilacs and greens. Still less did the garden, nor the trellised house in which the little singer, fairest of all the flowers, stood, form the proper environment for her lily.

How cozy the garden enclosure looked! The rear wall, overgrown with a variety of runners and little flowers, wall pinks and fuchs, was a structure, about man-high built of white brittle tufa. To the front of the garden on the right, embowered in vines, stood the priest's house; its polished, glistening, flower-boxed windows so reflected the sun, they seemed to be emitting light. On the left side of the enclosed plot lay the flower and vegetable gardens bordered and bedded with a jungle of odoriferous rose-bushes and elder-shrubs, a blessed paradisaical wilderness extending to the very garden entrance. The arbor was overshadowed by the obliging branches in shimmering white and red of a majestic apple tree in bloom. It was an exceptionally beautiful day in May. A glorious sky overspanned the earth and smiled upon the priest's garden and the orchard and the meadow adjoining. All nature, fragrant with the tribute of flowers and scintillant with light, was in its happiest mood, just like its queen, the lovely Agnes, who in her bower was emulating the song of the larks and the linnets on the field and in the trees. A curly haired dog lay sprawling at her feet, basking in the sun, without deigning the fair gardener a single look and a little lizard with lightning movement was playing hide and seek among the stones.

"In all this world I'm sad and lone," she sang again, engrossed in her work of fitting a huge bouquet into a vase. "This makes the fourth one filled," she said, "now two more and the middle altar is adorned; then four more for the Virgin's altar. Oh, come then soon, sweet Death! come soon, sweet—" she wished to continue, but at that very moment the garden gate creaked, and the dog sprang to his feet barking. The maiden looked and then turning to the dog she said: "Shame, Grunter, shame! Don't you know the sacristan? Go, chase out the chickens—there, just slipping through the hedge; see, two are already scratching in the lettuce; scht, scht, scht!" While the noisy dog was driving out the chickens, he whom Agnes designated "the sacristan" came up the garden to the rectory. It was Sparr. He was a lank, overgrown youth with a red scraggy beard and a head of scrubby hair. With a look timid yet bold he glanced at the girl and, lifting his cap, he greeted and courted ceremoniously.

"God bless you, Jack!" spoke Agnes, smiling; "it is all-hurry today—for me to decorate, for you to clean up." He passed on rapidly; but before entering the rectory, he turned and looked once more as if fascinated, at the girl, who as before was busy with her work. In the study of the priest upstairs, Sparr was reprimanded by the Rev. Pastor, as the Chapter had ordered.

Like an entrapped fox, the young fellow winced and turned under the reprimand and the advice of the priest: humble to the dust one moment, the next, with eyes ablaze that betrayed the wish within him to defy his kind, dispassionate mentor to his face. During the whole interview, the fellow, to confuse the issue, kept babbling of one thing, then of another, until finally told to answer briefly and without any irrelevant remarks the questions put to him. "Now mark you this," said the priest: "do not interfere with visitors to the church and stop your uncalled-for remarks about people. You have good qualities, but unless you get rid of your bad ones, you'll have the parish against you, and you'll have to resign."

"Then I will cast myself from the tower," the assistant, with eyes aflame, instantly interrupted. "I strictly forbid such remarks in my presence," said His Reverence exasperated. "Until now I have taken your part, but such words and behavior destroy the pleasure I find in protecting you." With a piercing look, studying and threatening, the sub-sexton was watching the priest while listening to the words just recorded. Then suddenly and abruptly, bowing deeply, he said: "Your Reverence, I will comply; I will satisfy the parish and you also."

A moment after he was gone. "A peculiar fellow," the priest remarked, "and yet I must not prejudice him." In the meantime the little flower girl down in the garden corner had received company. The teacher, and his mother who kept house for him, wished to help Agnes in decorating the church for the feast. "What sad words, Agnes, you were singing," the mother remarked. Agnes explained joyfully: "The sadder the song the more I like it; I can't account for it, although it has always been so."

"And yet I have never seen you unhappy," the teacher observed. "No; and still nothing jars me like loud laughing," she added. "That's simply becoming a decent girl," the mother, smiling sweetly at the maiden, remarked as she was starting for the church across the street with two large vases of flowers. The teacher left alone with Agnes asked: "Have you seen tomorrow's Sunday paper?" "No," she replied, continuing her work. "A poem, listen!"

The Farewell

We decked her to our sad delight A last time with earth's tinsel light; The ringlets in her golden hair A last time spoke a mother's care; A moment thus, then from our view She passed, 'twas with a last adieu; A nun demure, veiled form and face, To please a Spouse of wondrous grace. Now open, ye cloistral gates, the fair! Alas! to leave the pleasures rare: Comforts, honors, friends and home, As would her youth and grace become.

"Thy wreath is wetted with our tears, Oh, hide thou not our sighs and fears!" "Forsooth! Then voice not your distress In time like this of happiness." Fain would her heav'n-lit eye proclaim What peace within the cell does reign. "Go, lovely maid, serene and pure, The Loved One is the lover's lure."

She listened with curiosity at first, then of a sudden she raised her head blushing deeply, and with a frightened look peered into the paper, to see if what the teacher had read was really there. When, however, he showed her the paper and the poem signed "Agnes," she snatched it from him and exclaimed: "For God's sake, professor, how did my poem get into the Sunday Leaflet? I gave it to none but your sister to read and she is in the convent! This exposes me terribly before all the world! If uncle or aunt harbor the least suspicion—I will have to leave the house! And signed, too, with my name! It will kill me with shame!" She dropped her hands, speechless.

With a smile he said: "Agnes, the miscreant stands before you. The poem having pleased me so much, I thought it but right by having it published, to share my pleasure with others. You see what the letter I have taken from the letter-box says: To 'Agnes!' Please, send us more like it soon."

"For goodness' sake" the girl stammered, "had I expected this, I would never have written it. But how did you get the poem?" "My sister, to whom you dedicated it as a parting gift on her entering the convent, gave it to me. When giving it, she remarked that it grieved her to part with Agnes' poem, but that holy poverty permitted no alternative, and that I should return it to you with her best regards. I read the poem, copied it, and sent it in—if its publication has pained you, I beg your pardon. Here is the original." Drawing forth from his vest-pocket a little rose-tinted sheet, he handed it to Agnes; she, as if ashamed of it, hid it away immediately.

"For heaven's sake tell nobody about it," she whispered, "the lines were meant for your sister only." Steps were heard: it was the teacher's mother. Across the street from the church the spying eye of the sexton-belp had taken in this little episode between the two.

"Ah, I see, such is the state of affairs between the two," he hissed. "He has handed her a love-note to turn her head. But I will observe and watch—No one, none, none, shall touch this flower, did you hear that, pedagogue?" So muttered he, the jealous one, his evil eye still fixed on them; only upon the return of the teacher's mother did he cease his espionage.

The old mother suddenly screamed and turned round, as she came near Agnes. Laughing gleefully, Agnes asked: "Mother, did my garden-police frighten you?" "Garden police? No, but don't you see that repulsive frog, and right behind you, a snake?"

Unconcernedly the girl looked at the reptiles and said: "The one is a slow-worm, dear friend. The snails he rid the plants of at earliest dawn, is a service worth while; the other, a toad, is also welcome; they are my dear and valued sylvan police who stand guard against all garden-vermin."

"But so ugly and repulsive," commented the old woman. "Our good God has made them, Agnes said simply. "I have other such friends in the garden that know me, ants, for example, and strangest of all, two beautiful garden-snakes; the latter devour nice and noxious things and injure no one if let alone; they are not poisonous. I am sure they know me."

The woman shook her head in a way that meant to say she would never enter the garden again. "You are quite versatile," the teacher complimented the maiden, "elegist, poet, and mistress of the animal world."

"Please, professor, do not mock me; the titles you give me afford me no pleasure because the very one I crave most of all is forever beyond my reach—" "Which one?" Guileless as a child, Agnes replied: "The title of my patron saint: Virgin and martyr. The martyr's crown may still be within the scope of Christians living in Africa or in Asia among the Chinese. If you or someone could help me to such a title it were better than placarding me in the Sunday Leaflet."

They collected a last handful of roses. The teacher quite respectfully asked: "Are these your dispositions? Who knows what God has in store for you. The passion flower blooms here in our country, may, may bloom in our very midst, as well as elsewhere."

4. The Sowing of the Wicked

There was a rumpus again in the house of Mrs. Sparr, the mother of the sexton-assistant. The son

Prayer against Epidemic Diseases.

(Approved for the Diocese of Prince Albert by Bishop Pascal, O.M.I., on August 30, 1918, and endowed with an Indulgence of 50 days, which can be gained once a day by the Faithful within the said diocese.)

Antiphon. Remember, o Lord, thy covenant and say to the destroying angel: Now hold thy hand, that the earth may not be desolated, and do not destroy every living soul.

Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us. Lord have mercy on us.

Our Father (silently). V. And lead us not into temptation. R. But deliver us from evil. V. The Lord sent his word and healed them. R. And delivered them from their death. V. Let the mercies of the Lord give glory to him. R. And his wonderful works to the children of men. V. Lord, remember not our former iniquities. R. Let thy mercies speedily prevent us. V. Help us, o God, our saviour. R. And for the glory of thy name, o Lord, deliver us. V. Forgive us, O Lord, our sins. R. And deliver us for thy name's sake. V. Hear, O Lord, my prayer. R. And let my cry come to thee. V. The Lord be with you. R. And with thy spirit.

LET US PRAY.

O God who dost not desire the death, but the repentance of sinners, through the intercession of the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, look propitiously upon thy people returning to thee, that thou, whilst it remains attached to thee, mayest graciously remove from it the scourge of thy wrath. Through the same Christ our Lord.

ORATIO CONTRA PESTILENTIAM.

Antiph. Recordare, Domine, testamenti tui, et dic Angelo percutienti: Cesset jam manus tua, et non desoletur terra, et ne perdas omnem animam viventem.

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison. Pater noster (secreto).

V. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem. R. Sed libera nos a malo. V. Misit Dominus verbum suum, et sanavit eos. R. Et eripuit eos de morte eorum. V. Confitentur Domino misericordiae ejus. R. Et mirabilia ejus filiis hominum. V. Domine, ne memineris iniquitatum nostrarum antiquarum. R. Cito anticipet nos misericordia tuae. V. Adjuva nos, Deus salutaris noster. R. Et propter gloriam nominis tui, Domine, libera nos. V. Propitius esto peccatis nostris, Domine. R. Et libera nos propter nomen tuum. V. Domine, exaudi orationem meam. R. Et clamor meus ad te veniat. V. Dominus vobiscum. R. Et cum spiritu tuo.

Oremus.

Deus, qui non mortem, sed poenitentiam desideras peccatorum: per intercessionem beatae Dei genitricis, virginis Mariae, populum tuum ad te revertentem propitius respice: ut, dum tibi devotus existit, iracundiae tuae flagella ab eo clementer amoveas. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum.

Approbatur pro nostra diocesi. Concedimus indulgentiam 50 dierum semel in die lucrandam fidelibus has preces infra fines nostrae dioeceseos pie recitantibus.

IMPRIMATUR. ALBERTUS, O.M.I., Die 30 Augusti 1918. Episcopus Principis Albert.

Gebet gegen epidemische Krankheiten.

(Von Bischof Pascal, O.M.I., am 30. August 1918 gutgeheissen für die Diözese Prince Albert und mit einem Ablass von 50 Tagen versehen, der täglich einmal innerhalb der genannten Diözese von den Gläubigen gewonnen werden kann.)

Antiphon. Gedente, o Herr, deines Bundes und befehle deinem strafenden Engel: Halte jetzt ein deine Hand, auf daß die Erde nicht verödet werde, und töte nicht jede lebende Seele.

Herr erbarme dich unser! Christe erbarme dich unser! Herr erbarme dich unser!

Vater Unser (leise). V. Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung. R. Sondern erlöse uns von dem Uebel. V. Der Herr sandte aus sein Wort und heilte sie. R. Und entriß sie ihrem Tode. V. Sie sollen danken dem Herrn für seine Barmherzigkeit. R. Und für seine Wunder unter den Menschenkindern. V. O Herr, gedente nicht unserer alten Missetaten. R. Daß eilends uns zuvorkommen deine Barmherzigkeit. V. Hilf uns, Gott, unser Heiland. R. Und um der Ehre deines Namens willen erlöse uns. V. Sei gnädig unsern Sünden, o Herr. R. Und befreie uns um deines Namens willen. V. Herr, erhöre mein Gebet. R. Und laß mein Ruf zu dir kommen. V. Der Herr sei mit euch. R. Und mit deinem Geiste.

Lasset uns beten!

O Gott, der du nicht den Tod, sondern die Bußfertigkeit des Sünders willst: durch die Fürbitte der allerheiligsten Gottesgebärerin und Jungfrau Maria befehle, bitte herab auf dein Volk, welches sich wieder zu dir wendet, auf daß du, während es dir getreu bleibt, die Weisheit deines Jernes barmherzig von ihm abwendest. Durch denselben Christum unsern Herrn.