

A DAY'S FISHING

It was Easter Sunday and the clocks were striking six when two men met each other in the street.

"Hello! Good morning to you! You are up early."

"Yes, I am going out fishing, as you see by my rod. My bait and tackle are hidden away in here," tapping his knapsack. "But you? What brings you out at this time of the morning?"

"I am going to Mass."

"What! To Mass? You?"

"Yes; I. The truth is that my wife made me follow the retreat that has just been preached in our church. For peace sake I gave in, but the preacher—he is the right sort, if you like. You should have heard the way he stirred me up! Death, judgment—hell for those who have not repented. I tell you, his sermons made one think a bit. Then I went to see him. Not to go to confession! Oh, dear no! I had no intention of doing that, you may be sure. I only just went in to talk to him."

"And what did he say?"

"He asked me about myself. He evidently knew—well, the sort of life I led."

"And he was nice about it?"

"So nice, that after we'd been talking for a bit, he said to me: 'You thought you'd be afraid of going to confession? I thought so. But do you realize that the thing is done? All you have to do now is to kneel down and tell Almighty God you are sorry for the things you have been telling me.'"

"And did you kneel down?"

"Certainly I did; and he said the words that wipe the sins away. Now you see me, a new man, beginning again with a clean sheet."

"The fisherman had almost dropped his rod and basket in his amazement, as he stared, wide eyed at his friend."

"Well," he ejaculated, "I must say I admire you."

"It would be more to the purpose if you imitated me. You wouldn't regret it, I assure you. If you only knew how I feel! For twenty-six years I've been living like a heathen, like a dog. It was about time for me to become a Christian again."

"He stretched out his hand as he moved to go on his way."

"Well, I must go, for Mass will be beginning in a moment. Good-bye for the present, and good sport!"

The fisherman stood watching him as he strode away down the street. He had known the man for years, but there was something buoyant in his walk this morning that he had never noticed before.

"What an extraordinary thing?" he murmured to himself. Then, trying to shake off the impression his friend had made upon him: "After all, it is only one more caught in the web of clericalism. For myself, I prefer liberty."

And slipping his rod on to his shoulder, he started off quickly in the direction of the station.

A few minutes later the train was moving through suburban ways out towards the open country. It was a glorious morning. The sun was already shining and the greenery of spring-time showed on every side.

The fisherman sat with his eyes on the moving panorama, looking on the brightness of the April world without, yet with a shadow that he hardly understood overclouding his mind. The thought of his friend haunted him, and he could not help dwelling on what he had heard.

"He's done it. Well, I suppose our friendship will be at an end now. What a fool! Actually to go to confession! Of course, if he really believes, if he has the Faith—"

Vainly he tried to think of other things, to fix his mind upon his day's sport, but it was useless. He could not forget the meeting with his friend, and his parting words rang over and over again in his ears: "It would be more to the purpose if you imitated me. You wouldn't regret it. I assure you."

And then the remembrance of his friend's evident happiness forced itself upon him, till he had to press his hands to his eyes as though to shut out some painful sight.

"Imitate him indeed!" he muttered; "not likely! I can't see myself kneeling before a priest and confessing my sins. Not I, indeed! For women it's all right—or for men when they are dying."

Now he turned to the window, trying to fix his mind on the growing beauty of the landscape.

"Yet one can't deny that there is a God. The country out there never made itself; and if there is a God there must be a religion, and if the religion is His—well, I suppose one ought to practice it."

Then impatiently he changed his train of thought.

"Why, if I go on like this I'll soon be a devotee myself. I'm no better than a magnetic needle, always pointing in the same direction. But no; the needle of a compass has not got liberty as I have. I am free, and I will never give up my freedom."

The train was going at full speed now, dashing along between two high banks on which the flowers only showed as a blur of color, and the carriages creaked and rocked as they sped along.

"Fancy, if there was an accident! Supposing I were killed; what would I see on the other side? He shuddered even as he questioned himself. "What, I wonder. Nothing? No, no, that's impossible! There must be something. For me it would probably be—hell!"

Quickly he reckoned up the passing of time: "Twenty-two years of ungodliness!"

The banks seemed to be flying past the windows, when the grinding of brakes and a sudden slackening of speed caused the carriages to rock uneasily for a moment. What had happened? For an instant the fisherman's heart ceased beating; then, as the train slowed down still more and more and stopped beside a platform, he pulled himself together angrily.

"What a fool I am! What a fool one makes of oneself thinking about such things—old, worn-out superstitions! It's only a station—my station, so I have arrived safely at my journey's end after all."

The road from the station to the river ran towards a pretty little town. The country air was keen enough to sharpen the traveller's appetite, for he had eaten nothing since the previous night.

"I will have some breakfast at the inn," he thought to himself, looking down the road that led to the town. There were people on it, both before him and behind—peasants in their Sunday 'buits, and their wives in gay apparel, with floating head-gear.

"Going to Mass," commented the fisherman to himself; and as the sound of the church bells floated softly to him, making itself heard above the songs of the birds in the hedgerows: "Church bells, he murmured: 'Easter-time bells. Ah, well, let those who wish to go to church follow their inclinations, and I will follow mine. They hear their Mass in the church; I hear mine by the river!'"

Then the remembrance of his friend came back to him, and his face grew grave.

"He is making his Easter duty now, away at home, and these people here they are doing it too. I had no idea so many people still kept up the old custom. After all, there would be nothing to find fault with in it if one had not to go to confession."

He walked on, forgetful of the country round him, his thoughts full of unquiet things.

"What can be the matter with me this morning?" he thought to himself. "I feel depressed, as though there was something on my mind. I wish I had never met that fellow! He and his Easter duties—"

As he drew near the town the people on the road became more numerous, and as he reached the cross roads he found himself surrounded by church-goers, and, with a feeling that was half remorse, half curiosity, he let himself be carried along with the stream.

"Supposing I went in," he thought—"just for a moment, to see what is going on."

The crowd pressed together at the doorway and then fell apart in the nave, and the stranger found himself alone, and uncertain what to do. "Where ought I to go?" he wondered. "I don't know the ways of these places."

A confessional was standing conveniently near and he slipped into its shadow, and stood there looking at the scene before him. It aroused a memory of bygone days that for years had never come to him, of things he had long forgotten, yet which now, at sight of the old church, sprang into life again.

"Until I was fifteen I, too, used to go to Mass," he said to himself with a sigh. "It was only at my mother's death, when I had no one to go with, that I gave it up. If she can see me here today, she will be glad I know."

He pulled a chair towards him and laid down his rod and fishing-tackle, and then, standing upright again, he crossed his arms.

"After all it is Easter Sunday. Now that I am here, I may as well stay. It is only giving up half an hour of my day, and I shall feel less of a heathen."

The priest, a man still in the prime of life, had just begun Mass, and all the people in the church were saying their prayers. "They believe," thought the onlooker. "They are lucky; they have the Faith."

His eyes were on the altar, but his thoughts were still bused with his neighbors. "After all they have reason on their side. At least they are logical. They are thinking of their souls; they are preparing themselves for eternity—and I? When I have had my breakfast and done my day's fishing, shall I have any less reason for fearing death than I have now?"

There was a movement in the church. Chairs were pulled forward and turned, and the people sat down to listen to what the priest had to say.

He reminded his hearers that Jesus, risen again, can never die; that unbelievers and freemasons were as powerless to destroy the Church as Pilate and the Jews had been.

"The Church is certainly living still; and his priest, these people, all this around me proves it! For twenty centuries she has been living! A fine lease of life, that!"

The fisherman's attention strayed away from the preacher. "Then, why is it that the newspapers are always saying it is dead? Ah, they are liars! After all, the other is logical; only confession always stands in the way."

He noticed, even whilst Mass was going on, that people continued passing in and out of the confessional near which he stood. "It is like a mouse-trap," he thought to himself. "The clerical snare into which the unwary put their heads."

Then the bell recalled his attention to the altar, and as all about him fell on their knees for the Elevatio, he, almost unconsciously, did likewise. It was years since he had knelt in adoration, in humility, and

he did not understand the feelings that crowded over him. A desire for something, he knew not what; a feeling of remorse, of regret; an entreaty that he could not put into words.

"My God!" It was not an exclamation. For the first time in years it was a prayer, he believed again, in spite of years of doubt and neglect of duty, and kneeling, although he could not pray, he felt his heart raised up to God in sorrow and in love.

Again the altar-bell sounded; this time it rang thrice, and men and women alike—yes, men, almost all who were in the church—went forward to the altar.

The fisherman watched them in speechless wonder. The day of his own First Communion came back to him. He had knelt by his mother's side, and even still he could recall his happiness. Then his friend's words of that very morning came back to him: "Why don't you imitate me? . . . I am happier than I can say. . . it is not really hard to go to confession . . . and then all is wiped: one is clean—free."

He remembered this, but he also remembered his own prejudices, strong and bitter, and there was conflict within him that he could not overcome. "Why not do what is right?" an inward voice kept asking. "Pluck up your courage and be a man!"

He bent forward and looked at the confessional. A woman was just coming out, and there was no one to follow her. After a moment of waiting, the priest opened his door and stepped out. As he did so, his eyes fell on the fisherman and he stayed the hand that was taking off his stole.

"Are you waiting for confession?" he asked.

The fisherman tried to say that he was not waiting, but his voice made no sound and before he had time to make another effort the priest had sat down again and drawn open the slide.

There was another agonizing moment of hesitation.

"I must go in," he muttered to himself. "He is waiting. I must tell him I am not going to confession."

He plunged into the semi-darkness. The curtain fell behind him. He was on his knees, and before him he could see a white image of the Crucified Savior. . . . Again his tongue refused to obey him.

"Father give me your blessing, for the grace of God has overcome the devil."

Five minutes later he was kneeling in the church again. The dreaded ordeal was over. He had been to confession. There was no word to express how he felt. Light, happy relief, a little of all, but oh! so very much more! Twenty-two years all wiped out and forgiven in five short minutes!

"Why on earth didn't I think of it sooner?" The thought flashed through his mind; and then he gave himself up to prayer, to thanks and adoration.

The priest at the altar-rail was still giving Holy Communion, but now the crowd who had pressed forward was thinning, and the last penitent joined their ranks.

Twenty-two years! Was it to be wondered at that, as he left his place, his eyes were dim. Twenty-two years, and now once again the Son of God had come into his heart!

An hour later, a man was fishing on the riverbank, half hidden in the reeds and bushes that edged the stream, the sky blue above his head, the water rippling at his feet. It was an ideal day, not perhaps for fishing, but for enjoying life. The birds were singing, and nature was rampant with the joys of spring.

But bright and beautiful as was the day, it was nothing compared to the peace and beauty in the fisherman's soul. As he watched the float on his cast bobbing idly on the water, his thoughts flew back again and again to scenes and acts of the last few hours.

"I have found a fisherman far cleverer than myself," he murmured. "He has induced me to swallow His divine bait. I shall certainly never forget this day's fishing, and for all eternity I shall thank God for it!"—Alicia Deasse.

THE SOURCE OF CONSOLATION

A priest was recently approached by a Protestant woman, who asked for some religious keepsake for her son, leaving that day to join the colors. She could have given him any number of tokens, she said, but preferred something which would have a religious significance. The crucifix satisfied her, and it delighted the son. It proved to him a real reminder of God, and it was a consolation to the mother's heart to know that her son would thus be given thought of God. Yet in that reminder and consolation the mother and son were sinning greatly against the Church to which they belonged.

Protestantism associates reverence of the crucifix with the worship of idols, and condemns the Catholic Church for countenancing such a practice. To a Catholic the above is only another instance of the heart craving to satisfy its own yearning for God, disregarding for the time being the unnatural, artificial prohibitions of Protestantism, the dreary spirit of which is emphasized by many similar incidents during these troubled times.—Catholic Transcript.

JIM

By Mary Hayden Harkins

The Avenue that afternoon in the brilliant autumn sunshine was like a many-colored kaleidoscope, with its ever shifting currents of well-dressed humanity, its endless lines of splendid motor cars, its gorgeous shop windows with their display of the accumulated treasures of the world. But through the gay throng Kathie Ward threaded her way with unseeing eyes.

She was a lithe, graceful girl in the early twenties, with eyes of Irish blue, a sunny tint in her brown hair and a peculiar sweetness in her pale, set face. As she passed the public gardens her gaze for a moment wandered to the flowers, brilliant patches of white, scarlet and yellow—then she turned her glance away, lost once more in her own sad thoughts.

"Yes," she murmured to herself, "I know I'm not good enough for Jim, but I want him just the same. I wonder if any one else ever loved the way as I love him—and lost him?" The pain in her throat sank deeper and settled with agonizing keenness around her heart.

Suddenly, the girl quitted the fashionable district, and turning into a side street soon faced the kind of throng that makes a cosmopolitan city—before a brick dwelling she finally paused and, obeying the sign on the door, walked in. Her breath came at quick, uneven intervals as she ascended a steep flight of stairs. Involuntarily she heaved a sigh of relief when the chapel was reached and she sank on her knees at the altar-rail. Her bowed head rested upon her thin hands, and the tears stole down and ran across her long fingers. Her brief expressionless prayer was ended, she rose and went out quietly.

At the foot of the stairs she lingered a minute, watching the candles that burned brightly before St. Anthony's statue. Kathie went over to the turn and hesitatingly pressed the bell. Its peal echoed loudly through the silent house of prayer. She listened to her own heart-beats until she heard the flapping tread of sandals feet across bare floors and a voice greeting her.

"Sister, will you pray for a young man who was injured at his work?" asked the girl, timidly.

"We will." The wooden slide turned, and there on the concave reverse lay a printed slip. "Here is a little prayer to say for him."

"Thank you Sister." The girl opened the bag that swung on her arm and dropped the slip into it. As she did so her eye fell on one lonely dollar there. She hesitated—she needed it—then it lay upon the turn. Suddenly, she became conscious of the nun's voice inquiring:

"Has he been prepared for death? Is he seriously injured?"

"Yes, Sister, he is dying." The girl's eyes filled, and she made her way towards the door. She had said it herself: Jim was dying!

Out on the street the elevated roared past her, and its whirling, grinding sound seemed the echo of her own words—dying—dying!

"Suppose Ma will be drunk again to-night," she thought bitterly as she hastened along.

Kathie Ward had never envied any one. This world had given her little but she had asked for less. The insistent display of wealth made by the fashionable women whom she served each day aroused no feeling of discontent or resentment. Madame's shop was a busy place, although distinctly exclusive. Even when it was not busy, Madame's tongue and temper made it interesting. Yet Kathie accepted all things in stoical silence and was always the conqueror of the girl who was battling to please Madame.

But to-night, for the first time in her life, rebellious upheaval surged through her heart. "Drunk—morning, noon and night," she muttered; "I'm sick of it!"

Kathie could just recall her father, a decent man, and her mother—a different mother then—and certain pleasant holidays—never-forgotten memories! But that was all so long ago! Nearer, torturing memories were of herself—hungry, shivering, with head bent while she—whispering from some innate source she knew not whence—clinging to the unsteady hand that guided her along and turning her childish face away from the pitying glances cast upon her.

There were worse women in the world than her mother, Kathie knew, but the knowledge did not make her rue less better in her portion.

But Jim's coming had brightened all this sadness and colored the gray till it gleamed like gold. Kathie knew what people had said—that Jim was a fool to be looking at her, even if she had a pretty face, for he had a great head and would be a big man some day. The girl choked back the sobs. Now a light in her life was going out. Jim must die. A ray of hope flickered; perhaps he would live. Weren't the Poor Clares praying for him?

"No," Kathie murmured; "he will die, and other people no good to themselves or the world, will live!" Kathie drew a long, hard breath. "Jim is so good! Now, there is mother—if she died instead of Jim—"

The dreadful meaning of the words she had spoken frightened her. Nervously she raised her hand to her brow and blessed herself hastily.

At last, the girl halted before a tenement house, ascended one flight of stairs and then another, paused before a door, unlocked it and entered. Kathie began at once the preparations for the evening meal.

Soon her mother came in. She was a large, hollow-eyed woman and much the worse for drink to-night. Heavily she sank into a chair in front of the table, and in silence Kathie placed her supper before her. The girl then went over and sat by the window, resting her head on her hands—thinking. In a few minutes the woman rose unsteadily from the table.

"Don't go out again to-night, mother," the girl coaxed, and her tone was very kind.

Grumbling the woman made her way toward an inner room. Kathie cleared the dishes from the table, and when her work was finished again took up her position at the window. The spring evening was warm and mild and the girl longed to be out of doors. Soon sounds of heavy breathing came from the inner room. The girl rose, quietly lighted the lamp and placed it in the bracket above the table.

At the door of the sleeper's room, Kathie paused and listened. "How long will she sleep? Past closing time for the shop at the corner!" the girl hoped fervently. Then she tiptoed softly out.

"I'll just go as far as the Immaculate and say the Rosary and come right back," she murmured. How often she and Jim had dropped in to say the Rosary together! It eased the pain in her heart to think that she was going to do something to help him now. She wondered how he was to-night. But she must wait until morning would bring news of him!

As Kathie stepped into the lower hall, on her way back, she heard a dull thud and then the sound of hurrying feet. With an instinctive fear she rushed up the first flight.

The people on the second floor, aroused by the noise, had thrown open their door and a stream of light played on the narrow landing. It eased the pain in her heart to think that she was going to do something to help him now. She wondered how he was to-night. But she must wait until morning would bring news of him!

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