

THE ANGEL OF THE MINES

An Original Short Story (Written for The Register)

My short story opens with the times when the gold mines of the Black Hills were in full operation. We all know how many young men left their Eastern homes to seek their fortunes in the far west. Amongst them was one young man of twenty years of age, who had an aged father and mother depending on him for support. His letters came regularly, containing sums large enough to keep his parents comfortably, showing he was meeting with success financially. He had also a sister two years younger than himself who was married and living near home, so she was able to be a source of comfort to her aged parents in their declining years. The gentle Alice was very pious and a model of charity and amableness to the surrounding country. Her husband was a young man of good character and in every way suited to be the partner of such a good girl as Alice was. So Edmund, away in the gold fields, felt more content knowing his parents had someone to love and care for them in his absence and to write to him if any sickness or misfortune of any kind should overtake them, as they were very old.

When Edmund was away eight years the sad news reached him of the death of his father and mother, both having contracted typhoid fever and died within a week of each other. They were buried long before the letter reached him, as the stage carried the mails in those days, and it took weeks after the journey, leaving it weeks after a letter was written ere it reached its destination. So Edmund's letters became fewer and long intervals between them and Alice, and at last ceased altogether, which caused her many a sleepless night thinking of him, wondering how he was living or had he met some sudden death in the mines where so many accidents were recorded from time to time, but she never ceased to pray for him, if living for his spiritual welfare, and if dead for the repose of his soul. By this time Alice's son was five years old, and the joy of his father's life. He spent his leisure time in planning how to provide the means to give his boy a good education to fit him for whatever vocation he aspired to when he grew older. The boy's first wishes were that he might be like the good Father Lynch, the parish priest, who often stopped in his way for a few minutes to speak to the little Joseph Saint Claire and pat his rosy cheeks and bless the boy, who through his parents, freely endeared him to him. So the boy grew up an apt scholar, and we find him at twelve years of age a model youth, saying less of his future but thinking deeply. He knew his father was a struggling mechanic, which means no wealth accumulated, but unknown to Joseph there was a small amount to add to the last savings every month, as they knew their boy's whole ambition was to receive holy orders. His whole spare time was spent in extra study so as to make his college course shorter. Put a sadder blow was yet to fall on those good people, for the father and husband took sick, and ere Joseph was fifteen years old his father died. Poor Alice's heart was almost broken and Joseph tried to hide his sore heart trying to comfort his widowed mother. He tried so hard to be brave; it meant more than the loss of his dear father to him; it gave the final blow to his hopes of becoming a priest, as the little they had laid by was pretty well spent during their father's illness. So now he must try and get a situation to support his delicate mother. One night he lay awake thinking how he would manage to get the most remunerative work, and after all his studying he was no further on than when he began, so he rose from the bed and said, "It's a wonder I did not think of it before. I will say the Rosary and ask the Blessed Virgin's intercession." And so he did, and as he finished, strange to say, he thought of the gold mines of Colorado, where his uncle ventured so long ago, and said to the gold fields, I will go. But the hardest task was yet before him, how could he get his mother's consent? He rose next morning more determined than ever to go west. He sat very quiet at the breakfast table and ate very little. His mother knew something was troubling him, so when he was through she said, "Joseph, are you not well?" "Yes, mother," said he, "I am strong, my mind and body are in going to the west, as did my uncle, but I will come back with the means to make you comfortable and to fulfil my whole life's wish." And he related to her his last night's experience. No one but a mother can have any idea the sore heart poor Alice carried that day, but still in good faith she never tried to alter his determination, but began to prepare him for his journey, and the day the train carried him from the town of B. away from mother and home, a youth of sixteen years, left his poor mother's heart almost broken. After he was gone she took two rooms with a good family who loved her dearly, as they knew her whole history and treated her like one of their own family.

Joseph's first journey alone from home was a very lonely and sad one. He needed, poor boy, some kind friend to cheer him, but he was among strangers in a strange land. After a tedious journey of a week or more he reached the gold fields. Oh what a change for him after leaving the refinement of home and the gentle surroundings for the roughest kind of companionship of the miners of that day. As he left the stage that carried him from the nearest railroad, he was directed to the office where the men were hired to work in the mines. He heard almost failed as he thought to himself, what work can I do and what if they won't hire me at all. As he knocked gently on the office door and a gruff voice called out, come in. As he opened the door the clerk, a middle-aged man of not too bad appearance, said, "who are you?" as he saw the mild, refined face of the boy. In fact he said afterwards he thought it was an angel. "I am looking for your boy? O. Of course he is, St. Claire." "What kind of work can you do?" "I will try hard to do something," he humbly said. "You don't seem strong," said the man. "But I am strong," said Joseph, "and I am willing to work." "Well, that is a good point in your favor anyway. I will see Boss Edd. Sit down; it's near suppertime, and the boss will be

in to report the day's time." So poor Joseph sat down and prayed for work in that lonely place. It was not long until the miners began to file past the office to their boarding house and sleeping departments. And Joseph thought as he saw them how hardened looking most of them seemed. He had never seen the like of that before. After a while a tall, stalwart man walked into the office. He was better looking than any of the rest and seemed more particular in his dress and so he seemed more refined looking. It gave Joseph some encouragement to think he was Boss. Something touched a cord in his young heart. He thought somehow he would be his friend in that lonely hour. As Boss Edd did not notice the boy when he came in first, he gave a start when he saw him. Somehow those large blue, innocent eyes appealed to him. Just then the man in the office saw him looking at Joseph and he said, "This man wants work in the mine; if you have any place for him I would like you would give him a chance, as he came a long way to get employment." Said he, "I will see. We need some one just now to carry water to the mine. I could give him that for a while until some other job is vacant. So it was settled and so Joseph accompanied the Boss to the boarding-house, which was a rough shanty, as they called it, built of logs, and rough beds or punks built against the walls and supplied with blankets. They all slept in one long building. And another such building did duty as a dining-room with a man cook. It all seemed strange to Joseph. He went in and washed himself after the long, dusty journey and adjourned with the Boss to the dining-room and took good care to sit beside him while eating. After supper the Boss showed him a bed, and before retiring he knelt down and blessed himself, and as he did so one of the miners threw a bundle of rags at his head, and another even more hardened said, "We want no saints here, young one, no such in this camp. Only a week ago we hunted a preacher out of here." "Surely," said Joseph, "you don't go to sleep without saying your prayers. I never do and never will. I would suffer death itself first." A silence fell on the crowd, who admired the bravery of the Young One, as they called him, and they said no more, as Boss Edd just came in for the night. Joseph spoke up and said: "Mr. Boss, can I not say my prayers night and morning as my mother taught me to do. If not I will go away in the morning. You have been very kind to me since I came, but I cannot deny my Lord and Saviour?" The Boss' face became ashen in its whiteness, for perhaps his mother also taught him to pray and the sweet memory came rushing over his soul. He never was a really bad man, only careless since he came to this hardened place and had forgotten to pray long ago, and now this young boy was reminding him of his lost opportunities. "He paused and said, "Yes, you can say your prayers, and I would like to see the one who will interfere with you in so doing." "In the name of God are none of you going down to save them?" "Why, boy," said one, "it would be madness to go down there, as they are no doubt dead and we would only be buried alive as there may be another explosion worse than the first any minute. See, we cannot move the derrick which carried them down, and no doubt there are tons of stones and ore on it now." Then I will do down," said Joseph. "Tie a rope round my body and lower me and I will at least see if they are dead or not." "Are you mad, boy, to risk your life for no purpose. We understand this business and you do not." "I am going down," said he, "even if I jump down." So they saw his purpose was settled and they tied the rope on his waist and just as he was descending he made the sign of the cross and the young hero disappeared out of the sight of the miners, who stood with bared heads and shamed faces. But hark, the signal for a full on the derrick was given and they drew it up to find Boss Edd lying senseless on the table or platform which they stood on to go down or ascend, and the other man was quite dead, with a horrible hole in his head, made by a large stone which fell on the derrick and held it fast against a projecting ledge. They lifted their Boss off the platform and laid him gently on the grass, and also placed the dead miner on the ground and then turned their attention to Joseph, who was still in the mine, but the rope would not draw up. It was fast somehow, and what to do they did not know. If they sent down the derrick it might crush him, if he was still alive. As they were considering what to do against a sudden "My God," said Edmund, "he is dead, and all for me. Unworthy me!" And he opened the coat over the bosom of the boy and thrust his hand over his heart to see if there was any sign of life. As he did so a picture fell out of the boy's inside pocket and the cry that rent the air never left the minds of those present. "Alice! Alice!" were the only words the man could utter. "Dear Sister Alice, at last he said, "this poor boy, of course he is, St. Claire, dear eyes of yours were looking out of his at me always even in my dreams, and I could not account for the impression they made on me; made me a better man than I had been for years, for I said my prayers last night for the first time in years. The grief of the man was terrible. But what is this he hears. "See Boss,

he is alive." He looks again on Joseph and sees again those dear eyes open in wonder. And it all comes back to him and he shudders, "but says, "thank God, you are safe," and all those round him bear their heads with reverence. They carry him gently to the camp, taking care he does not see the poor dead fellow creature that he risked his life to save. He was but slightly hurt, so he was around in a few days. As he did not yet know Boss Edd was his uncle, he took him away quietly one evening to a silent spot and questioned him about his home and his mother, and when he told him all as we have repeated in the first part of our story, the Boss' eyes filled with tears and he said, "I am that uncle and you have not only saved my life, but you have, with God's holy help, saved my soul." It's useless to try to describe Joseph's joy at finding his uncle. He wanted to write at once to his mother, but Edmund said, "No," we will get there as quickly as a letter will and I want to see her so much to ask her forgiveness for my long neglect of her." So after Edmund settled up his affairs and placed some one else to fill his position in the mine, he bade good-bye to all the men. The manner in which the men all treated his departure from their midst showed he held a tender spot in all their hearts. They all gave an affectionate squeeze to the hand of the brave young Joseph and asked him to come and see them some time and that he would receive a much warmer reception than he did on his first visit to the mining village. He promised, if ever it was in his power he would come back and we will see how this promise was fulfilled. So our two men journeyed home as fast as stage and train could carry them, Joseph looking much more rugged than when last he journeyed over the road, until one evening near sunset they arrived at the door of the house where Alice was residing. She was sitting sewing at the window of her room and she happened to look through the vines of morning glories which almost covered her window. She revived in a short time to hear the two loved voices explain all. How happy she feels at this moment. She has her dear brother once more whom she had given up for dead and her dear boy returned to her so soon it all seemed like a dream. And more, as her boy's future was secured. Edmund had acquired riches in the mines, being overseer and partner as well in one of the richest mines of the Black Hills. So Joseph was sent to college. They are three moved to a city the closest to the mines, so that Edmund could pay occasional visits to the works and be near his sister and her boy. So the years passed away and one bright morning the services in the Cathedral were more imposing than usual. There was one more young priest added to the number. Joseph's mother's heart was bursting with joy and she saw her dear boy arrayed in his priestly garments. Only mothers who receive such a blessing from the hand of the Almighty know how thankful she felt that day and the following days of her life. So the young Father Joseph was stationed at the Cathedral until a parish was appointed to him. One request he asked of his superiors was to be permitted to visit the mines. And it was granted. So at an early period he, with his uncle paid a visit to the mining village of former days. And oh, the joy of those poor fellows as they after expressed it, to see the Angel Joseph again in their midst. In the most of them he worked a conversion and the rest at least contented him and made it pleasant for him to carry out his priestly duties. He always visited the mines and he was always known as the Angel of the Mines. So now we will add to them for the present, Edmund Fitzgerald was happy in the knowledge that after all his faulty life he was in the end the means of doing so much good. MARIE LEE.

RIGHT IN HIS LINE. Comedian: "Who's backing your show?" Tragedian: "He's a wealthy Chicago pork-butcher, and he seems confident that the venture will be a success." Comedian: "Great faith in his ability to make money out of hauns, eh?"

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The Plague

Graphic Word Pictures from a District of India Where the Scourge Claimed 200,000 Victims

In the January-February number of the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith" there is a letter from Right Rev. G. Pelckmans, O. M. Cap., Bishop of Lahore, containing a graphic account of the plague which has devastated the Punjab in India.

"Suddenly, like lightning from a clear sky," writes the Bishop, "the plague broke out—the bubonic fever which in two years claimed 141,789 victims at Khuspur. The number I have given is official, that is to say, much below what in reality it should be. For the natives, exasperated by the sanitary rules which the authorities have vainly tried to persuade them to follow secretly buried many of their dead, who thus were not included in the official count I may say without exaggeration that 200,000 perished between the 6th of January and the 1st of May of this year (1903). One morning the cry was heard, 'The plague is in the village and terror spread among the people. I know of no better way to convey an exact idea of the panic produced by the appearance of the scourge than to transcribe those two letters which I have recently received:

LETTER OF REV. FR. BERNARDIN, Khuspur, May 23, 1903.

The weather has grown terribly hot, a fact which will for time at least, lessen the ravages of the horrible epidemic. I am able to breathe a little easier and I will attempt to give you some slight idea of what has taken place here during the past month.

We had celebrated the feast of the risen Lord, and I was returning to my house when I suddenly found myself surrounded by a group of natives, weeping and crying piteously: 'Father, father, pity! have pity on us! The plague is in the village. A young man has died after two days' illness and two others in the same house have fallen sick.'

Without pausing I hurried to bury this first victim and then returned to the hut where he had died to administer the last sacraments to his poor mother. An hour afterwards she also was dead. Losing no time, I went down to the others and examined them; the tumors under their arms were very noticeable. There was no room for doubt; it was the plague. I sent word to the mother superior of the convent. God alone knows the immense amount of good which she has done in this village. As soon as she had finished caring for the fifty or sixty poor sufferers who came daily to the dispensary, the indefatigable Sister went from house to house, arranging the beds of the stricken, cleaning their dwellings, washing and binding their repulsive sores, giving them medicine, advising them as to the precautions to be taken, reviving the courage of the timid, or reciting the prayers of the Church at the bedside of the dying. Many and many a time was she exposed to contracting the evil. In spite of all our efforts to withstand the progress of the scourge, it continued its ravages and in a few days I had buried fifty of its victims. They had departed well prepared for death. All the catechumens who had not received baptism begged me with tears in their eyes to administer the sacrament to them.

If my people at the beginning of the epidemic had been more prudent many would have escaped the contagion. I had advised that no one go near the affected except those who were absolutely obliged to do so. Useless advice. The evil spread to such a degree that I had buried forty more in a few days. The people were seized with a panic and fled from their homes to camp in the open fields. This gave rise to a very sorrowful incident.

One evening a Christian came to inform me that a woman who had been attacked by the bubonic fever had been forsaken three or four days before. I hurried immediately to her house. In a dark corner of a room I discovered a dead body already in the process of decomposition. I returned to the door to get a breath of fresh air and to call the family which was camping in the open. But what good did it do to ask them for help? They told me they were all afflicted with the disease. I was obliged to wait until the next day, when with the aid of some good Christians I carried away the others who had caught the contagion from the unburied corpse. I asked for information and learned the following. It appeared that as soon as the poor woman was stricken she had called her son and said to him: 'I have the plague; there is nothing to be done for me. I must die. As for you, run outside; place some water near my bed and leave me to die in peace.'

One does not know whether to admire this evidence of self-abnegation which is by no means common in a pagan or to be indignant at these children without heart abandoning their mother about to die such a sorrowful death.

At present the plague is diminishing, but it is not yet over. May the God of Mercy deign to withdraw this scourge!

LETTER TO THE REV. MOTHER WILPINE, SUPERIOR OF THE CONVENT.

*** On that day we commenced our visits to the plague-stricken, especially to the native women. Permit me to give you an example. We knocked at the door of one of the huts which contained a fever patient and it was immediately opened. A vile odor which assailed our nostrils nearly forced us to retreat; the room was crowded with men and women and altogether unventilated. With great difficulty we forced our way to the sick bed. Our first care was to drive out of the house all who could be of no assistance; then we aired the place and carried the sufferer outside and set her down in the shade. The victims of the plague are attacked with violent fevers and sores appear on the arms or in the throat where the glands break open; the wounds enlarge more and more until they are of great size. There are few known remedies. When a person dies a great hub-bub is immediately set up. All the women of the neighborhood collect and commence a lamentation over the body, at the same time beating their breasts with a cruel and unchristian shudder. These newly-courted Christians have not yet renounced this stupid practice which is a remnant of paganism.

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On the other hand we find among our young Catholics many edifying traits. This is one example among many:

The father of a family had fallen sick. When Father Bernardin had heard his confession and was leaving he said: "To-morrow morning I will return and give you Extreme Unction and Holy Communion."

The sick man's daughter, a child of 14, hearing that God was to come to her house, was filled with joy and, having prepared some whitewash, straightway set about whitening the walls of the poor little hut. (Passing by chance, I asked what she was doing.

"God is coming to-morrow morning," she replied. "And I must make ready to offer Him a worthy reception.")

"But, my dear child," I continued, "do you know that you will make yourself ill by working so hard in this hot sun?"

"Father Sahib will give us God's blessing, and we will be protected from the plague."

Poor girl! Upon the following morning she was taken down. But the Lord considered her simple faith and she is now convalescing.

The plague-stricken who escape death (and they are few in number) remain extremely weak and emaciated, with a deathlike pallor. Their ulcers are so large and deep that without any exaggeration two fingers may be thrust into them.

In finishing I wish to narrate another edifying incident in relation to a young Christian named Paul, twelve years old. His mother had been stricken by the plague, and his sister, next his sister-in-law, and finally himself. Little Paul was prudent and, as the father had recommended, took no solid food, an essential condition to recovery. His mother, although as old as the hills and as hard as a rock, nevertheless came to the point of death. The boy was inflamed with apostolic zeal.

"Mother," he cried, "fear nothing. I will make you well. Baptism is an infallible remedy."

And seizing a dish filled with water he poured it out upon the head of the old woman, saying:

"Mother, I baptize you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

When he told the father of his heroic act his young zeal was necessarily somewhat cooled, for he learned that his mother had already been baptized.

Thank God, the scourge is now disappearing. Let us continue to pray, however.

"To the joy with which I as Bishop read these two letters," continues Mgr. Pelckmans, "breathing as they do an angelic simplicity, was mingled a feeling of sadness. It has probably been remarked that, owing to the deadly climate of India and the privations which the missionaries are forced to endure in caring for the poor, the sick and the orphaned, their lives are fore-shortened by many years. With what fervor do I pray God from the bottom of my heart to inspire generous souls to send me a little out of their abundance! Who will aid me to build a house and a church which will be larger and less unworthy of the God of our tabernacles? Who will give me something to relieve the poverty

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of the unfortunate, to soften the lot of the little orphans and to restock the dispensary which at present is entirely without the medicines needed for the care of the sick?"

Salt in the oven under baking tins will prevent pastry scorching on the bottom.

If the milk used in making baked or boiled custard is first scalded and cooled before using, the custard will be smoother.

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