

"I can't see a thing!" protested the sister. She jumped up on her toes, trying to see above the heads of all those who preceded her.

"As in a dream John began to undo his palette and his brushes.

"John cried Mary, beginning to laugh a little, "you can't work here! It is dark and you have no easel and no canvas! What are you doing with your palette, feverishly trembling. "I can see it clearly," he cried. Don't move—I have paper here! It will do until I can get home to a canvas. Don't stir, I say. Hold my palette! There!"

In mad haste, he had his portfolio in the crook of his arm, the paper spread upon it, and began to paint rapidly. Mary held the palette, still craning her neck.

"I can't see a thing!" she complained. But John did not answer. The crowd broke up gradually. The artist went into the little edifice followed by the more faithful and a solemn chant rang out. The yellow light from the door streamed out and lost itself in the darkness before it reached our friends who no one seemed to notice; and John still painted with laboured breath and flying fingers. Mary said afterwards that he could not see his strokes, so dark it was.

Mary tried to see the face he had painted, but could not, so dark it was. "But I'm going to see what you saw!" she cried.

She ran to the door of the church, now empty. There was not a statue in it that could have been seen from the range at which they stood. Mary felt that this was so, but it took her and John another day to make quite sure of this. Then she had a talk with the pastor of the flock and had shown him the head which John had painted. The good old priest gazed at this long and lovingly, and sighed, as John had sighed.

"I never saw anything like it," he whispered at last. "Our Blessed Mother must have looked like that. Oh, glorious, glorious! No, there is no face like it in our part little church. There is no statue of the dear Virgin that you could see from beyond the church door. Yes, yes, it is marvellous; it is marvellous indeed. Had Father before returning to America, they took the head of the Madonna to John's old master in Paris. His was a great name, and he was a great critic, the greatest this day. He had seen the head how great you were, both in the hurried rush on the canvas, as John had again painted it in daylight.

"Marvellous!" the man said, and strangely silent, as if he knew you had talent, but not like this!"

He gazed at it long and silently, his head upon his hand. When he looked up his eyes were dim.

"Do not go to America," he said unsteadily. "I am getting old, and I need some one to help me here and to fill my place when I am dead. When you studied with me, I did not know how great you were. This picture has shown me. Let us be equal partners. One-half my income here is yours, if only you will stay!"

Mary Madden went back home alone. The family fortune was made, and old John Madden did not have to keep even his wife and himself in his age.

"I knew that fortune awaited us in Holland," cried enthusiastically Mary. "But I did not know that it would come to John in the divine and the miraculous!"—Jerome Harte in Irish Catholic.

A PRODIGAL'S RETURN

The closing night of the mission at St. Mark's had come, and the zealous missionary had already announced the subject of his sermon. "The Love of the Sacred Heart for Sinners."

What better crowning for the week of labor? It would touch the coldest heart and win it back to God. Had Father the expression of earnestness and happiness lighting up the faces of the congregation all told him that he was right.

It was into the midst of this congregation that a poor sinner had come. The dark and starless sky above, the bleak winds of a March night, and the cold, wind-drizzled rain had made the shelter of cheer from his heart. An hour before, with hat roughly drawn over his eyes, his collar carelessly turned up and his hands in his pockets, he was slowly tramping along the street when he met an elderly man picking his way in the direction of the church.

"Say, old man," he asked, touching him on the shoulder, "can you tell me where a poor wretch can find a bit of shelter for a night? Not particular at all; any old shed or cellar is good enough."

The old man, throwing back a heavy winter cap over his forehead, looked up at his rough inquirer.

"Yes, I can tell you a place," he replied slowly. "Why not come along and follow the crowd to church over yonder? This is the last night our mission never is a stranger turned away from the house of God."

"Church?" grumbled the stranger. "Oh, no, no church for me. Haven't crossed the threshold of a church nor spoken to a priest for thirty years."

"All the more reason for you coming in to-night. So you've given up, and you're afraid to meet a priest, eh?"

"Well, something like that," replied the stranger, rather wearily.

He had spoken the truth. A wicked life and the lack of courage to undo it frightened many an outcast. In childhood days the words "Catholic, and church, and priest" were familiar words in this particular stranger's vocabulary. Many a long hour he had spent in the house of God. He had often served as altar boy. Those were the happy hours of his life, his time of peace, his paradise on earth. But temptations came, and despite the entreaties of a loving mother, little by

little he fell away from the early practices and yielded to a life of sin. It was just thirty years since he left his home to try the painted glories of a life at sea. Tossed from one to another of the world's seaports, the fair altar boy had been transformed into the pitiable wretch who now stood at the door of the little Church of St. Mark, not musing for the good of the soul, but simply seeking a night's shelter for a wretched body broken with years of sin and vice.

"There's some truth in what you say," repeated the stranger, meditatively. "I've given up everything."

"Well, come along in," urged his interlocutor, who had a hope that the grace of conversion was imminent.

The sermon was drawing to a close, and the zealous preacher was begging the attention of all.

"I have but a few words further to add. Listen, my dear people! Do not conclude, to the story of the breaking of a mother's heart. It will help you to realize the deep sorrow of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so often painted by our ingrate."

In the little village of S— there lived a Catholic mother kind, loving and exemplary. Year after year she had toiled and labored for her children, sharing their joys with them, commiserating in their sorrows, and sympathizing with them in their pretty troubles. Happiness reigned in that little Nazareth, and peace, and love, and joy. Night after night that good mother prayed for her little ones, and this was her persevering prayer: "May the Sacred Heart watch and protect my children! May they ever remain near me, and if they stray away, may I call them back!"

"Whom God loveth He chastiseth; to those whom He chastiseth He sends His heaviest crosses. And so before he was old, the mother He placed the cross upon her shoulders. The sweet peace and joy of that happy family ended after a few short years. The bright sunshine of the mother's heart was hidden in darkness. The eldest son, grown to manhood and yielding to the sinful schemes of evil companions, broke away from the arms of the one who loved him most. One by one the days lengthened into weeks, the weeks into months, the months into years, and there came no sign of the prodigal. Seven long years rolled by, stretched upon a bed of sickness, the mother lay. Two candles flickered on a table near by; at the bedside knelt her other son; a priest, bending low, was praying for the dying mother, who even in her last moments could be heard murmuring. "Sacred Heart of Jesus, give me back my lost child! All was soon over; an ungrateful child had broken mother's heart. Pray, my good people, the mission went on to say, with tears in his eyes, "pray with me that mother's prayer; May the Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on that lost child! I have strong reason for asking you; that prodigal was my own brother!"

The bells of the little chapel of St. Mark were striking ten. The last few of the congregation were leaving; the sexton was turning out the lights. Near to the altar railing the stranger was kneeling, his elbows resting on a table, and his head buried in his hands. The sexton came near and touched him on the shoulder.

"You must be going now," he whispered. "I am about to close the doors for the night."

"No," replied the stranger, "I cannot go before I say a few words to the preacher."

"Well, you must be quick about it," replied the sexton. "The priest is still in the sacristy, but ready to leave in a minute."

The next moment priest and penitent were sitting side by side.

"Father," said the stranger, "it was only to seek shelter that I came here to-night, but thank God, I came. I heard the story you told. That story is the story of my life. I, too, have craved away from the dearest of mothers and the happiest of homes. Year after year I have been wandering from country to country, from city to city, and now I am after thirty years, the miserable wreck you see before you, dejected, homeless and dead."

All during this harrowing tale the good missionary lowered his eyes; tears started from them as the penitent sinner repeated the sad story he had heard from the altar steps. The moments were intense, while the rain outside pattered against the window-panes. The stranger slipped his hand into a deep pocket of his ragged coat, drew forth a package and began to unwrap the covering which enclosed a tiny, well-worn case.

"Father," he said, opening the box and passing it to the priest, "there is the picture of my mother whose heart I broke. It has followed me over the world. I know not whether she is living or dead."

The missionary looked at the picture a moment. He had begun to whisper words of encouragement to the repentant man when something caught his eye. He hesitated, but only for a moment; he looked again at the picture. The next moment his arms were thrown about the neck of the stranger, his head resting on his shoulders and his eyes wet with tears. The picture was that of his own mother; the prodigal was that of his long-lost brother, reclaimed after thirty years. The Sacred Heart had indeed heard the oft-repeated prayer. He had brought back the stray sheep.

The following morning, while the mother in heaven looked down into the little chapel of St. Mark, he beheld her repentant son kneeling at the altar railing, receiving the Bread of Life from the hands of his brother.—George E. Haun, S. J.

"Where do all the pennies go?" is the question asked by a great many of them go to church in place of their silver and gold relatives.

It is this little instinct "must" that dogs and cats, that drives and bestirs them, that makes us willing to suffer privations and endure hardships, inconveniences and discomforts, to work slavishly, in fact, when inclination tempts us to take life easy.

HOW ST. BRIDGET MADE THREE CONVERTS

Sweet Rose of goodness, dropping gracious dew! Bright Star, diffusing light from heaven's blue; Vessel of grace, Birgitta, hail to thee!

Thy dew of holiness and purity, Let fall upon us, and our souls renew In this and vale of mortal misery!

O pray for us, Birgitta, mother blest! Beloved Spouse of Christ, His mercy pray! That to our Fatherland—true Home of rest, He may conduct us as the One Straight Way!

These verses, from the talented pen of Eleanor G. Donnelly, are a translation, from the Brevari, of the Antiphon of St. Bridget of Sweden, whose feast is celebrated in the Bridgettine Order on the twenty-third of July. Donnelly allows our readers to enjoy passages from a letter in appreciation of these verses written by the Lady

Abbess of Syon Abbey, Chudleigh, South Devon, England, who is a sister of the order, and who is still active in the destinies of the Church Militant.

"Quite recently," says the Lady Abbess, "the Superior of a Community of Anglican Sisters who reside near our old pre-Reformation Monastery (in fact, her convent is built on part of the property that belonged to Syon) wrote to ask if we could give her a design for a statue of St. Bridget of Sweden, as she was going to have one placed in her chapel. I am hoping our Holy Mother will convert this community, who are anxious to honor her. May I ask your prayers for them?"

"I am most interested to hear of the twelve ex-anglican ministers who are studying for the priesthood. A few years ago there were five from this neighborhood, and all are now most zealous priests doing great work in the slums of London. They used to visit our Chaplain, on the quiet, before their conversion. One day three of them were detained in a heavy downpour of rain and when they arrived here they were simply drenched."

Their coats were sent into the Convent to be dried, when some of our younger nuns, learning that they were the coats of three persons, gave them an extra drenching with Holy Water and touched them with a Host of the Eucharist (which I do not know what virtue this carried with it, but the news, very shortly after, was that they had gone up to London to be received into the Church."

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