

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

A Strange Capture and How Liberation was Brought About.

By ALAN SULLIVAN

AS the Bishop mounted his pulpit the congregation of St. Cyprian's settled itself to hear him. The lights sank into a modulated glow through which the white altar shone and amid a delicate tracery of carving the great organ gleamed like a forest of golden shafts. It was all a fitting framing for the magnificent figure of the prelate whose deep voice searched the furthest cloistered recesses of his cathedral.

This day's address was the penultimate of a series that had rivetted the attention of a thinking city. The Bishop was in arms. The church was menaced, as it had never been threatened for centuries, by a creed that spread with insistent rapidity, striking at the roots of all he held dear; his fighting blood was up and St. Cyprian's drew as with a magnet the brains and power of the city to hear him. He was master there, one might read it in the waves of hushed emotion that spread at his feet, in the tense figures and parted lips that followed him.

Now he was potent with his message and it grew in intensity as he neared his conclusion:

"You may weigh and measure the stars," rolled the great voice, "you may girdle the world with steel and flame and electricity; you may solve mysteries that have baffled the ages, but for your soul's salvation you must accept the unseen God. You may conquer the habitable earth, but you must be conquered by the Spirit.

"The false prophets of a false creed who have knocked at your doors hold with the Persian poet who sang:

"We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow shapes that come and go."

"My people, can you believe that life ends all?" Leaning forward, vibrant with eloquence, appealing and compelling, his voice softened into a depth of tenderness: "Ask it of the worship in your children's eyes, of the love that has transformed the world. In the quiet lapses of time when unutterable questions come, ask then if we are born to meet and greet, to love and die, and this alone."

The keen wedge of his argument had entered the hearts of many. They forgot all save what lay behind the cloud; he had set them face to face with their own souls.

In the vestry a verger brought him a note, and he opened it mechanically, weary from the intense strain of the service. The note was unsigned and begged that he would come forthwith to visit the writer on a matter of immediate importance—a carriage awaited. He was hesitating when he noticed that the note bore the address of a house on a nearby street off the avenue; a street traversed almost daily between his rooms and the cathedral.

He shook off a sudden sense of depression and went out. A brougham stood by the curb, the coachman touched his hat, and the bishop entering, was driven rapidly to a house whose exterior was well known to him. Mounting to a pair of wrought-iron doors that swung open at his approach, a footman in reproachless garb ushered him through other massive doors into a spacious library, and said respectfully: "The Master awaits you, sir."

The Bishop with interest surveyed an admirably proportioned room. It was lofty and lit entirely by a skylight; the colouring was subdued and restful, the walls were lined with books and engravings, a large writing table stood in the centre and a fire was crackling on the hearth. At the far end, through an open partition, he saw what was evidently a bedroom, and this also was lighted from above.

His cursory glance was ended by a step at the door by which he had entered, and a man of middle age and peculiarly interesting appearance stood before him. The Master was about forty-five years, slight, rather below middle height, dressed with scrupulous care and exactitude—his face keen and intelligent, and his eyes extraordinarily bright and liquid, the pupils contracting and expanding with great rapidity. He spoke with a nervous, apologetic decision, and asked his visitor to be seated.

"Cultured mentality; somewhat over concert pitch," thought the latter, regarding him keenly.

The Master stood over the fire and with one nervous hand on the mantel, said, "Bishop, for the liberty I have taken and am about to take, I must express my sincere regret." Here his listener raised a deprecating hand and the master continued. "In me you behold the leader of that school of modern thought, to which you have referred within an hour as pseudo-science." He hesitated a little and the Bishop broke in:

"The subject is rather large to be disposed of here and now, my time is not my own to-day, but if there is any way in which I can be of immediate service, pray command me."

"Your presence is and will be of the greatest service, I assure you, Bishop," said the master, smiling. "The main difficulty we have experienced here, has been the extraordinary influence exerted by the series of addresses you have been giving, all of which have been attentively heard by my brother and myself."

The Bishop regarded him complacently and the



Drawn by Leonard P. Lowson.

Found the golden cross that hung from the neck of his new friend.

level voice went on: "We have felt, for some time, that our cause, which is that of the true happiness of man, cannot be more actively furthered without the help of certain individuals in this city, who by means of their social and especially financial standing, can place it where we wish and intend to see it placed. This assistance cannot be obtained in the face of your influence. We therefore are regretfully compelled to remove that influence for such time as is necessary for our purposes."

His auditor stared blankly at him, as he added, "I beg that for the next few days you will consider yourself the guest of the Doctrine of Reason."

The Bishop rose. "You are as crazy as your creed," he said, angrily.

The master's lips then twitched. "Oh, don't put it that way. Will you not call it a friendly visit in the interests of science?"

The prelate stared. Here, in his own city—whose sounds came faintly to his ear—kidnapped—he, the Bishop—preposterous!

The master's mood changed a little: "I cannot wait upon you further," he said, shortly. "I would like to present my brother, to whose charge I commit you, he will interest you." In a moment the

hall door opened and a man entered. The Bishop gazed at the newcomer with a gasp of astonishment. Nature had used the same mould in fashioning them both. In appearance, in height, in expression, he was the Bishop's double. There were the same massive shoulders, the same strong, thick, grey hairs. He had the Bishop's clean-cut, forceful features, so identical that even the Master looked from him to the other with wonder in his eyes. He had the direct penetrating episcopal glance, and even his manner of standing was that of the Bishop. There was one only difference—his eyes were grey, while the Bishop's were blue.

"You will see that our guest lacks nothing," said the Master, and, turning to the Bishop, "you will find some rather unique first editions on the walls. I trust the days will not hang heavy."

The door closed behind him. It had all happened so quickly and yet so definitely, that the Bishop felt as if every argument, remonstrance and threat, had been answered before it was voiced. His eyes rested on those of his silent double: "Sir," he said, "I am at a loss to know how your cause can profit by this."

The brother seemed not unprepared, and replied in a voice, the echo of the Bishop's own, "I regret, sir, as much as the Master, the course we are obliged to pursue. We have considered the consequences and the most serious which occurs to us is the possible derangement of some of your diocesan affairs. You may, however, avoid this, by co-operation with us."

"Co-operate with you after this insult? Never!"

"Let me remind you, that so far as the public goes, your diocese need not be without its head."

"Do you suggest that I should use a pair of unscrupulous bandits as my medium?"

"I only wish to say, sir, that any communications you wish to send will be forwarded, so far as they do not tend to shorten your visit. I suggest that you send word to your house-keeper, that you have retired for a few days' rest from diocesan cares."

The Bishop pondered. There was nothing vital to be provided for, except the final sermon. Could the time be better employed than in preparation? The church militant in the man asserted itself, and, his face relaxing into a grim smile, he stepped to the table and wrote a short note, asking for fresh linen and clothes and saying that he would be occupied for the immediate future. This he handed to his double and once again the heavy doors closed.

His rooms were explored with intense curiosity. The hall doors opened only from without. The bedroom was replete with every convenience, and the library was evidently the collection of a literature of no mean order. The place was eminently comfortable, and, not the least interesting was a pile of papers containing verbatim reports of his recent sermons, heavily scored and paragraphed. The sight of them brought home his extraordinary position, and as the chimes of St. Cyprian's fell faintly on his ear, infinitely distant and removed, he stepped quickly to the door and threw against it the weight of his powerful shoulders.

It did not yield a fraction of an inch, but waiting for a moment in puzzled helplessness, it swung open and the brother stood without in respectful attention.

"Bishop," he said, quickly, "I beg of you to make my duties as mutually agreeable as possible."

Your lunch awaits you," and the same blank-faced footman appeared with a well-laden tray.

The radiance of a perfect winter's day filtered down through the broad sky-light, as the Bishop woke, after a night of dreamless forgetfulness. That startling Sunday seemed very unreal and very distant until his surroundings forced themselves to his attention with gentle insistence—an insistence that took point when a quiet voice came from behind the heavy curtains. "When you wish, Bishop, breakfast will be served."

He turned on his pillow—it was real then—his curiosity, his pride, his courage, all were piqued.

"In half an hour, if you please," he said, and within the time left his bed-room bathed and refreshed and keen to meet the day.

The library had been garnished anew. Flowers smiled on the tables, a fresh fire greeted him with subdued crackling. His breakfast was dainty and appetizing, and as he rose from the table the great door of his imprisonment opened ever so little and closed behind a small boy about ten years old, who advanced timidly with an armful of morning papers.

The Bishop smiled his welcome and from one to the other sped that subtle thrill of understanding which most big men and little children have in common. His knee was inviting, and, perched upon it, the boy responded readily: "Father sent them, sir, and hopes you slept well."

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