At Last

"O spotless maiden, hail to thee," rang out in rich, full tones from the music-room. Joseph Harrington paused on the stairs to listen. Never had he heard a voice so sweet, and he wondered who the singer could be. It was one of the last rehearsals for the Vincentian Hospital benefit concert. Joseph had come in late, and was on his way to Father Stephen's room for a book he had left there.

There had been much confusion this last week, caused by the sudden illness of the soprano. The manager had despaired of finding a substitute at so late an hour.

Evidently they had at last succeeded, and Joe Harrington was more than glad of the golden promise in that rare young voice. They had all worked too hard for this concert to see it a failure.

He entered the music room a little curious to see the new acquisition. Smiles greeted him on all sides, for he was a general favorite. Smiling in return, he glanced from face to face, seeking the stranger. When he found what he sought he caught his breath in sharp surprise.

Over by the organ, facing him, a tall, slender girl was standing, listening attentively to the instructions of the organist. Her face was as rarely lovely as some pictured saint, a clear-cut oval in its frame of dark hair. But it was not her beauty alone which so caught and held the attention. There looked from those sad, clear eyes a white young soul, troubled, but unsullied.

A low prelude on the organ and that voice rang out again, filling the room with its thrilling sweetness. "O spotless maiden, hail to thee, who deign'st our guiding star to be." The breathless hush was the best applause. The face of the singer was lifted up, and her eyes saw some lovely vision. "To point to heaven's felicity."

As the last low Ave Maria died softly away the listeners came back to earth with a sigh.

After the rehearsal Joseph Harrington was presented to the fair young singer, and talked with her a while. To his surprise, he found that she was not a Catholic. She had been educated at Immaculate Conception Academy, she said, and to that fact was due her presence there that evening.

To his cousin, Sister Ignatia, teacher of music at the academy, Father Stephen had written of his dilemma about a soprano for the concert. Sister Ignatia had told him of this old pupil of hers, who had graduated some years before, and whose home was but a short distance from St. John's Cathedral.

Mary Kingsley proved to be an earnest, eager worker, as anxious for the success of the concert as those who had been interested from the first.

During the rehearsals and in the days that followed Joseph Harrington met her frequently. As he came to know her better he found that the admiration he felt from the first was more than justified. Her beauty of face was no mere accidental physical perfection, but the outward semblance of the beauty within.

There was a nameless, mysterious something about her which he found himself constantly trying to solve. She was so frankly fond of pleasure, so girlishly gay and light-hearted, yet reserved and quaintly dignified. But it was not that, either. It was an unfathomable something, a fleeting expression, a look in her eyes, now there, now gone, puzzling, baffling.

Her voice as he had first heard it rang ever in her ears. He had heard others sing that Ave Marie, but no one else put into it that indefinable expression of childlike confidence and loving tenderness that made it a veritable prayer.

He never saw her look quite so lovely as she did when she sang that song. He asked her once what it was she saw that made her face light up and her eyes grow bright. Was it some girlish dream of "heaven's felicity?" She smiled and shook her head. Her answer was as puzzling as everything else about her.

"I see a little convent chapel, dimly lit and shadow-filled; a flower-decked shrine and a statue of a lovely, slender woman, crowned with stars, a crescent moon beneath her feet. I sing to her. Do you know, Mr. Harrington, no flowers have ever smelt so sweet as the flowers in that shrine. Their fragrance comes back as I sing."

"But you are not a Catholic, Miss Kingsley."

"No," slowly, was it regretfully? And there came into her eyes that look he could not understand. Words failed before it, and for a time they were silent. Then they spoke of other things. He would not force her confidence.

Suddenly one day he realized that he loved her. She had not been out of his thoughts once since that evening he entered the music room, seeking the owner of that lovely voice.

When he asked her to marry him and she accepted he half hoped that she would speak of their difference of religion, but she did not. Looking into those pure, earnest eyes, he was willing to wait, confident that in a short time there would be no difference.

When he spoke of his religion he found no occasion for argument or dispute. Mary listened attentively, sometimes eagerly, and seemed as conversant with the subject as he was.

He often thought that she was going to surprise him by telling him she was already a Catholic, but their wedding day passed and his hope was unrealized.

Nor did she avail herself of the many opportunities that presented themselves during the first five years of her married life. Her home life was peaceful and happy, but she herself was often restless and discontented. She tried to conceal it from her husband, but his loving eyes saw more than she thought.

So it was that when a mission was given at St. John's in the September of the fifth year after they were married he urged her more than was his wont to attend the exercises. She put him off from day to day, and when the night of the closing exercises came was apparently still indifferent.

He found it hard to leave her alone that evening, lingering as long as he could, hoping to the last moment that she would change her mind. She felt the silent pleading in his parting kiss, and when he was gone sank down for a moment into the nearest chair in an abandon of bitter thought.

All about her were the evidences of his care for her comfort, luxuries even, that he delighted in giving her. What were all these to a troubled spirit?

Across the gloomy silence stole the sound of a bell, ringing out its tuneful summons from the tower of St. John's. Mary arose hastily and went to the piano. Her fingers ran rapidly over the keys in an accompaniment, and she tried to sing. It was no use. The words ended in a sob. Rising again, she paced up and down the room. Suddenly the signs of struggle vanished from her face, replaced by the calm of decision. Hastily donning her wraps, she hurried to the church.

She entered and sank breathless into the last pew, just as her husband began to sing the "Veni Creator." She listened with mingled feelings of pride and pleasure to his rich baritone, and the words of the hymn had a new meaning for her.

"What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Mary started. She leaned forward and drank in eagerly the words of the priest. She forgot the crowds of people about her, forgot all things save the burning message straight from the lips of the speaker to her own heart. It was no flowery flight of eloquence but an earnest, forceful appeal from a true soldier of Christ. Behind his words lay the strength of a life lived in the manner he presented to his hearers as the only one worth while.

Mary Harrington's doubts and fears fell away from her, and her restlessnes and agitation were stilled to a firm and holy purpose.

As Joseph came down the stairs from the choir loft, still thrilled with the beauty of the service just concluded, his eyes fell on an upturned face in the outsurging crowd below—the beautiful, eager face of his wife.

With a little cry of surprise he hurried to her.

"Mary, you here—alone?"

"Take me to him, Joseph, now, this very night. I must speak to him."

"Take you to whom, dear—to—to—" he began doubtingly.

"To that priest who preached. It is not too late. Don't you think we can see him to-night?"

Wondering, but rejoicing, he led the way to the sacristy. They found that Father Casgrain had gone to the rectory, so they followed and in a few moments he joined them in the reception room.

Mary found his presence as inspiring as his words had been, and the silence of years was broken.

She told him that she had known the Catholic Church to be the true one since she was a girl at school, but had not had the strength to put her belief into practice.

Seeing the look of surprise on her husband's face, and the very evident interest of the priest, she told at once the story of what had so long been her heart's secret.

"I shall have to go back many years to make clear to you both the influences and circumstances that have shaped my life.

"You have often heard me speak, Joseph, of the time our home, up to that so happy, was broken up by my father's disappearance. He had gone to California, the gold fever being then at its height. He had great hopes of increasing his fortune.

"For a time we heard from him regularly, then suddenly his letters ceased. All mother's efforts to learn of his whereabouts were fruitless. She was heartbroken. I was only twelve, but I remember it all as if it were but yesterday.

"That my sister Angela and myself might not be neglected during the many times mother was necessarily absent from home, she placed us at Immaculate Conception Academy.

"What a terrifying mystery those words were to my youthful imagination—Immaculate Conception." Then half to herself: "And the unutterable beauty of the solution.

"Those years at the convent were peaceful and happy, as well as momentous ones, for me. I used to wonder sometimes why my mother sent us there. I knew from things I had heard them say that both my parents were prejudiced against the Catholic religion.

"I was a dreamy, romantic child, given to weaving stories about every incident of my daily life. The idea that I had been sent to the convent for some special purpose, yet unrevealed, became a favorite theme with me. Little did I guess in those days what the real purpose was.

"When I was told that a statue I much admired in the chapel was that of the Immaculate Conception, I went there frequently and knelt at the shrine as the other girls did. It seemed the best place to study out all that so puzzled me.

"That shrine and the lovely statue had a peculiar fascination for me. Particularly did I love to be alone there at dusk.

"Gradually things that had seemed so mysterious were mysteries no longer. I read and studied every book I could find that treated of the religion practised by those about me.

"And it was in that dear old convent chapel, about a year before I graduated, that my last doubt fell away, and I saw with the clear light of faith. How happy I was—for a time.

"Then came temptation. I tried a thousand times to tell Sister Superior to write my mother, but ever my courage failed me. Oh, I have been such a coward!

"When mother came to visit us and I looked at her sad face, I told myself that I would be an ungrateful daughter to repay all her kindness by adding to her sorrow. She had lost one dear one; it would kill her to lose another. From her point of view, I would indeed be lost to her. That I ascertained by judicious questioning.

"It never seemed to occur to her that Angela or I could in any way be influenced by our surroundings. She had not the faintest notion of the real truth. Nor indeed has she to this day.

"You see, I have been weakness itself.

"My last days at the convent were comparatively happy, for I had convinced myself that once at home I would tell mother all and be baptized, whatever happened.

"But when that time came I had less strength than before. None of our friends were Catholic, and I dreaded the curiosity and ridicule that I fancied my change of religion would excite.

"Mother's careworn face and absorption in her sorrow was a constant reminder of our peculiar loss. I longed with all my heart to do something to restore her happiness. Daily it became more difficult to do that which my conscience kept urging, for I thought it might banish all hope of happiness from her.

"I used to put my hands over my ears to shut out the sounds of the bell of St. John's ringing for services. To me those deep tones said, 'He that loveth father and mother more than me,' 'He that loveth father and mother more than Me,' over and over again, as the bell at the convent used to do.

"One day I happened to be passing the church, and could not resist the impulse to enter. I went to Our Lady's altar and wept out all my bitterness at her feet.

"Memories of the old days came over me, and I prayed as I had not prayed since then. I recalled the novenas made at the convent before special feasts or for particular requests.

"In a sudden access of fervor I resolved to make a novena for my father's return. I promised that if within a month from the day the novena closed he was restored to us, or if we heard something definite concerning him, I would make an open profession of the faith in my heart.

"Well, the nine days' prayer was said, and in perfect confidence I waited the answer.

"You know, Joseph, for you have heard it often, the story of my father's return, but you don't know that that Sunday evening of his coming home was the last day of the month following the close of my novena. Neither could you imagine that the wife you think so brave could be such a coward in an hour like that.

"When I realized that it was really father, when I saw mother in his arms, her dear, pale face lit up with joy, my first thought was one of intense gratitude that my prayer was answered. Then I remembered my promise. All my happiness vanished. How could I break up that home a second time? I asked myself that question in bitter anguish a thousand times in the days that followed.

"Then, to still my torturing conscience, I took a foolish step. I induced Angela to become an Episcopalian, and we were received into that church. It was the next thing to the Catholic Church, I told myself, but it was no use. I was more miserable than ever.

"I went into society more than formerly, and was very gay. People thought I was happy because of father's return. Oh, if they could have known how wretched I was!

"It was about that time that Father Stephen asked me to sing at the Vincentian benefit concert. And then, Joseph, I met you.

"When I knew that you loved me—it seemed so wonderful. I told myself that God had wanted me to wait for this; that I would not worry, that it was according to His will that things had so happened.

"In all my life I was never so happy as I was in those days just before we were married. They were golden days, full of golden promise for both. Yours have all been kept, Joseph, but mine—mine—" She dropped her head on her folded arms with a tearless sob. Her husband was at her side in an instant, consoling arms about her. Father Casgrain wisely left them alone for a while.

"Joseph," she said brokenly, "can you ever care for me again after to-night?"

"My darling, how can you ask? Have you not been the dearest, sweetest wife that ever man had? You used to puzzle me so when I first knew you, Mary, but since we have been married, since the years have drawn us closer together, I have read more of your thoughts than you have guessed. Mother has prayed so hard for you, dearest. I think that she, too, understands something of what has been troubling you. You are very dear to her, sweetheart."

"You have been so good to me, both of you, so beautifully good and kind."

When she was calm again, and Father Casgrain had returned, she told what remained of her story.

"When we were married I found, to my grief and despair, that the habit of concealment and delay was too strong to break. There was the dread, too, of having my husband know what a weakling I was.

"Then Our Blessed Lady once more held out a beckoning hand, and I did not follow.

"You remember, Joseph, the time I was so ill, and you all thought I could not possibly live. Your mother had sprained her ankle, and so could not come to me. But she sent her own scapulars, and told the nurse to put them on me. 'Mary will take care of you,' was her message. And she did. In that hour the crisis was safely passed, and I came back to life—and to my old ways.

"And why did I change to-night? I don't know, except that suddenly extraordinary strength was given me.

"When my husband had gone to the church, father, I tried to put away all thoughts of the mission and think of him alone. But my thoughts could not but follow him, and they led me here again and again. Then the bell rang out with the old dreaded reiteration. I tried to sing, to drown the sound, but it was no use.

"I felt an unutterable longing to be where Joseph was, to be with him always. There came a sudden terror, a fierce conviction that we should not be together through eternity; that he alone would be saved. Then I fled to the church. The manner of my going I cannot remember. You see, it was human love which led me, after all."

"Thank God, my child, that it has led you to Him at last. And you wish to be baptized—"

"As soon as possible, father; to-morrow if I may. I will not be content till that is accomplished. I have put it off so long."

All arrangements being made, Joseph and Mary, too unutterably happy for words, went out into the dim, deserted church, to kneel for a while before the altar, where long ago Mary made the promise that was to be fulfilled at last.—Anna Cecelia Doyle, in the New World.

Stomach Troubles of Long Standing

When Doctors' Treatment Failed this Severe Case was entirely Cured by

DR. CHASE'S KIDNEY-LIVER PILLS

Doctors failed to cure Mr. De Courcey because they were satisfied to treat the stomach instead of getting at the cause of the trouble in the liver and bowels.

The most complicated and deep-seated digestive troubles yield to Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, because of their direct and combined action on the liver, kidneys and bowels. We are continually receiving such letters as the following in regard to the failure of mere stomach treatment:—

Mr. Patrick De Courcey, Midgell, lot 40, P.E.I., writes:—"For some time I had stomach trouble, and was scarcely able to do anything at all. I was treated by doctors, but they did not seem to do me much good. A friend advised me to try Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, and I did so, to very great advantage, for my old trouble has disappeared, and, though past middle age, I feel young and hearty again. I have great confidence in Dr. Chase's medicine."

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Mrs. James Monteith, Saurin, Simcoe County, Ont., writes:—"I have used Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills for liver complaint, biliousness and terrible sick headaches, and have found that they are more effective than any treatment I ever tried. They cleanse the system thoroughly, remove the cause of pains and aches, and make you feel fresh and strong again. Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills are also excellent for stomach troubles."

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Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, one pill a dose, 25 cents a box, at all dealers, or Edmanson, Bates & Co., Toronto.

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It is without doubt the safest and most reliable remedy in existence.

It has been a household remedy for sixty-two years.

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Do not be humbugged into taking something the unscrupulous druggist says is just as good.

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Struggling Infant Mission.

IN THE DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON, FAKENHAM, NORFOLK ENGLAND.

Where is Mass said and benediction given at present ? IN A GARRET, the use of which I get for a rent of ONE SHILLING per week.

Average weekly Collection....3s 6d.

No endowment whatever, except HOPE. Not a great kind of endowment, you will say, good reader. Ah, well! Who knows? Great things have, as a rule, very small beginnings. There was the stable of Bethlehem, and God's hand is not shortned, I HAVE hopes. I have GREAT hopes that this latest Mission, opened by the Bishop of Northampton, will, in due course, become a great mission.

Best outside help is, evidently, necessary. Will it be forthcomming?

I have noticed how willingly the CLIENTS of ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA readily come to the assistance of poor, struggling Priests. May I not hope that they will, too, cast a sympathetic and pitying eye upon me in my struggle to establish an outpost of the Catholir Faith in this -so far as the Catholic Faith is concerned—barren region? May I not hope, good reader, that you, in your zeal for the progress of that Faith, will extend a helping hand to me? I cry to you with all earnestness to come to my assistance. You may not be able to do much: but you CAN DO LITTLE. Do that little which is your power, for God's sake, and with the other "littles" that are done I shall be able to establish this new Mission firmly.

DON'T TURN A DEAF EAR TO MY URGENT APPEAL.

"May God bless and prosper your endeavors in establishing a Mission at Fakenham.

ARTHUR,

Bishop of Northampton."

Address-Father H. W. Gray, Hampton Road, Fakenham, Norfolk, England.

P.S.—I will gratefully and promptly acknowledge the smallest donation, and send with my acknowledgment a beautiful picture of the Sacred Heart.

This new Mission will be dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua.