

“AND THEN?”

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It is told of Filippo Neri, a good and pious man, whom the Church of Rome has enrolled in her calendar of saints, that whilst living at one of the Italian universities, a youth whom he had known as a boy accosted him, with a face full of delight, to tell him that what he had long been wishing above all things in the world he had at length attained—that his parents had given him leave to study the law, and that he had come to the university attracted by its fame as a school of law, and that he meant to spare no pains or labour in mastering his studies, and thoroughly accomplishing himself as a lawyer. In this way he ran on a long time; and when at last he came to a stop, the holy man, who had been listening to him with great patience and kindness, said—

“Well; and when you have got through your course of studies, what do you mean to do then?”

“Then I shall take my doctor’s degree,” answered the young man.

“And then?” asked Filippo Neri again.

“And then,” continued the youth, “I shall have a number of difficult and knotty cases to manage; shall catch peoples’s notice by my eloquence, my zeal, my learning, my acuteness, and gain a great reputation.”

“And then?” repeated the holy man.

“And then!” replied the youth; “why then, there cannot be a question, I shall be promoted to some high office or other; besides, I shall make money, and grow rich.”

“And then?” repeated Filippo.

“And then,” pursued the young lawyer,—“then I shall live comfortably and honourably, in health and dignity, and shall be able to look forward quietly to a happy old age.

“And then?” asked the holy man.

“And then,” said the youth—“and then—and then—then I shall die.”

Here Filippo lifted up his voice, and asked—

“And then?”

Whereupon the young man made no answer, but cast down his head and went away. This last “And then?” had pierced like a flash of lightning into his soul, and he could not get quit of it. It became the text of a long discourse, which he preached to himself till it was applied by a higher Teacher. His venerable instructor had to add no more; his question had landed his young hearer amidst the powers of the world to come. The anticipated glories of time shrunk in the comparison. The youth shortly afterwards forsook the study of law, and gave himself up to the ministry of Christ, and spent the remainder of his days in godly words and works.

The application of this story, when told by the late Archdeacon Hare, in one of his sermons, we must not withhold. “My brethren,” he says, “the question put to the young lawyer I would put to all of you. I would urge you to put it frequently to yourselves. When you have done all that you are doing, all that you aim at doing, all that you dream of doing—even supposing that all your dreams are accomplished, that every wish of your heart is fulfilled—still I would ask you what will you do, what will you be then? Whenever you cast your thoughts for-