

MARGARET'S FIRST FAULT

Margaret was sixteen, and they awaited her in paradise. God had said to his angels: "This child is an angel like one of you; and as misfortune may come to her on earth I will recall her when the flowers fade."

She was a humble, gentle and very pious maiden. One evening of a summer's day, Margaret sat before her door spinning the household linen and singing a simple song, when a neighbor approached in holiday attire, hurrying to a merry-making. She paused for a moment before Margaret to display her new dress, her necklace and earrings, and held forth her hand to show a gold ring which glittered on her finger. And as she hurried on, Margaret followed her with a glance which troubled her guardian angel. The linen sped less rapidly through Margaret's fingers, the hum of the busy wheel ceased and the distaff fell from her hand. The noise of its fall awakened her from her reverie and she raised her eyes to behold standing before her in the rich dress of a courtier, and holding in his hand a hat from which hung a long-curling plume, a cavalier, who, in a soft and honeyed voice inquired the way to a neighboring village.

Margaret extended her hand in the direction of the route he was to take. The stranger bowed and in requital of the service drew from his hand a ring in which sparkled a diamond as brilliant as a star, slipped it on Margaret's finger, who found it more beautiful than that of her companion.

The stranger's face lit up with a strange smile, when suddenly a beggar in rags approached and in a broken voice, cried: "Charity, good maiden."

Margaret drew the ring from her finger and dropped it in the outstretched palm of the suppliant.

The stranger uttered a cry of rage and stretched forth his hand toward the young girl, but the beggar, who was no other than Margaret's guardian angel, covered her with his wings.

And Satan, who had come to tempt her, fled howling with rage.

The same evening the guardian angel sped to heaven, and, bowing before the good God said: "Lord, it would be well to recall Margaret: the flowers are about to fade."

"And the good God replied: "Fulfil thy mission."

And the next day Margaret died.