

what it will mean—love, happiness, a home. You are middle-aged and not as strong as you were. Soon you will be able to work no longer, and then what will become of you?"

"But he is not a Christian," answered conscience. "All these years I have thanked God daily for that casual remark which showed me my danger as we walked together on that last day. All these years I have thanked Him for the strength given me to refuse when he asked me to be his wife. His books prove that he has not changed. He is not one to change. He is so much stronger and cleverer than I, if I were to marry him I might lose my faith."

"And what of that?" urged the tempting voice. "What is Christianity after all? One church says one thing and another. Mr. Brown teaches many things which your father never believed. How can you be sure that there is any truth in any of it? Make sure of real happiness while there is time."

"There must be a God," said Naomi desperately to herself. "I have tried to serve Him all my life. Surely, He won't forsake me now. I am only obeying His command. Be ye not unbelievers." A bus stopped near her, going Deptford way. Naomi turned and ran from it, towards the railway station. She took a ticket to Charing Cross and hurried into the train. She had no definite plan in her mind except to get as far from temptation as possible. When she arrived at Charing Cross, she walked out into the whirl and rush of the streets and boarded the first bus which stopped near her. They went on for miles and miles, she knew, but where this was going she neither knew nor cared. If it took her far enough she would be safe. She was fighting the fight of her life. The battle raged in her soul, blinding her to outside things, while the great vehicle lurched and groaned its way through the crowded streets.

Naomi West had been reared in the Evangelical school of the Church of England. Sacraments were nothing to her but pious rites. "Forms and ceremonies," she had been told, "came between God and the soul." But she had firm grasp on one vital truth, the personal love of Our Lord Jesus Christ for man, that truth which unites the devout Protestant and the Catholic in a common faith. And it was this which made her shrink from the disloyalty of marriage with one who had nothing but amused toleration for her deepest belief.

A hand touched her shoulder. "We don't go no further, Miss," said the conductor.

Naomi got down and walked on quickly through the dark and unfamiliar streets, surging thoughts urging swift movement. She must wrestle with and finally throw this terrible temptation.

The sudden scream of a woman roused Naomi in a flash to her surroundings. A small ragged child, paralyzed by its mother's cry, stood right in the path of a big motor lorry. Naomi sprang into the road and flung the child to safety; and the lorry struck her and she knew no more.

When Naomi West opened her eyes after three days of unconsciousness she looked straight up at a statue of the Sacred Heart which stood at the end of the Hospital ward. She had never seen such a thing before, but like the apostles who had toiled all night and taken nothing, she murmured under her breath, "It is the Lord!" She tried to move, and a cry of pain escaped her, which instantly brought to her side a sweet-faced woman in an unfamiliar garb.

"What has happened? Where am I?" asked Naomi faintly. "You've been hurt," said the nun quietly, "but you're quite safe now. This is Our Blessed Lord's own house and He is taking care of you."

Naomi felt that she had come home. She was too weak and tired to ask questions. She just lay with her eyes on the statue until she fell asleep. There were no texts on the wall, such as she was accustomed to see in the houses of the Godly people whom she knew; but this statue was an embodied text. She knew what those open arms were saying. "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

When she awoke, refreshed, she began to question her nurse about her surroundings, and in particular about the statue of the Sacred Heart. This devotion, which is really the concrete expression of evangelical belief, woke an instant response in Naomi's heart, and, approached through this familiar door, she saw Catholicism as no strange land.

After a day or two she asked to see a priest, and listened to the truths of the faith, not only with the simplicity of a child, but also with the starved eagerness of one who has long hungered for he knows not what. How wonderful for her that all Our Lord's promises were meant to be taken literally, not figuratively. She hungered for the gifts He offered, and they could not say her nay. She knew, even before they told her, that but little time remained.

Naomi lay in a shaft of sunlight, her eyes on the statue of the Sacred Heart. "I know now what dear father meant when he used to tell me that the Lord's fulfillments are always greater than His promises," she

said to herself. That morning she had been given conditional Baptism, sacramental Absolution, Extreme Unction and Holy Viaticum. She would soon meet her Beloved face to face. She would never be homeless or loveless any more.—Denver Register.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

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THE PRODIGAL SON

A man had two sons. His wife was dead, but he still had these two sons, only two. But two are always better than one. If the first is away from home, the second is still there; if the younger fall ill, the older works for two; if one should die, even children die, even the young die, and sometimes before the old, if one of the two should die, there is at least one left who will care for the poor father.

This man loved his sons, not only because they were of his blood but because he had a loving heart. He loved them both, the older and the younger; perhaps the younger a little more than the older, but so little that he did not realize it himself. Fathers and mothers often have a weakness for the youngest because he is the smallest, he is the sweetest, he is the last baby, and after his birth there was never another one, so that his boyhood, still so recent, so prolonged, stretches out to the sill of his young manhood like a lingering halo of tenderness. It seems only yesterday that he was a baby at the breast, that he took his first stumbling steps, that he sprang up to embrace his father, or sat astride his knees.

But this man was not partial. He loved his sons like his two eyes and his two hands, equally dear, one at the left, one at the right, and he saw it that both were happy. Nothing lacked for either one.

And yet, even in the case of sons of one father, it almost never happens that two brothers have the same tastes or even similar tastes. The older was a serious-minded young man, sedate, settled, who seemed already grown up and mature, a husband, the head of a family. He respected his father, but more as a master than as a father, without any impulsive show of affection. He worked faithfully, but he was hard and capacious with the servants; he went through all the religious forms, but did not let the poor come about him. Although the house was full of all possible good things, yet for them there was never anything. He pretended to love his brother, but his heart was full of the poison of envy. When people say "to love like a brother" they say the contrary of what ought to be said. Brothers very rarely love each other. Jewish history, not to speak of any other, begins with Cain, goes on with Jacob's cheating Esau, with Joseph sold by his brothers, with Absalom, who killed Amnon, with Solomon who had Adonijah killed; a long bloody road of jealousy, opposition and betrayal. It would be more correct to say "a father's love," rather than a brother's.

The second son seemed of another race. He was younger and was not ashamed to be young. He splashed about and made merry in his youth as in a warm lake. He had all the desires, the graces, and the defects of his age. He was fitful with his father. One day he hurt him, the next, put him into the seventh heaven; he was capable of not saying a word for weeks together and then suddenly throwing himself on his father's neck in the highest spirits. Good times with his friends were more to his taste than work. He refused no invitations to drink, stared at women and dressed better than other people. But he was warmhearted; he gave money to the needy, was charitable without boasting of it, never sent away any one disconsolate. He was seldom seen at the synagogue, and for this and for other reasons the middle-aged people of the neighborhood, timid, colorless people, religious and self-seeking, did not think well of him and advised their sons to have nothing to do with him. So much the more because the young man wanted to spend more than his father's resources allowed him—a good man, they said, but weak and blinded—and because he talked recklessly and said things which were not fitting for his son of a good family brought up as he ought to be. The little life of that little country hole was repugnant to him; he said it was better to look for adventure in rich countries, populous, far away, beyond the mountains and the sea, where the big, luxurious cities are, with marble buildings and the best wines and shops full of silk and silver, and women dressed in fine clothes like queens fresh from aromatic baths who lightly give themselves for a piece of gold.

There in the country you had to obey orders and work hard, and there was no outlet for gypsy-like and nomadic tastes. His father, although he was rich, although he was good, measured out the drachma as if they were talents. His brother was vexed if he bought a new tunic or came home a little tipsy; in the family all they knew was the field, the furrow, the pasture, the stock; a life that was not a life but one long effort.

And one day (he had thought of it many times before, but had never had the courage to say it) he hardened his heart and his face and said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me, and I will ask nothing more of thee."

When the old man heard this, he was deeply hurt, but he made no answer, and went away into his room that his tears should not be seen, and for awhile neither of them spoke any more of this matter. But the son suffered, was sullen, and lost all his ardor and animation even to the fresh color of his face. And the father, seeing his son suffer, suffered himself, and yet more at the thought of losing him. But finally paternal love conquered self-love. The estimations and valuations of the property were made, and the father gave to both his sons their rightful part and kept the rest for himself. The young man lost no time, he sold what he could not carry away, gathered together a goodly sum, and one evening, without saying anything to his father, mounted his fine horse and went away. The older brother was rather pleased by his departure; the younger would never have the courage to come back; so now he was the only son, first in command, and no one would take away the rest of his inheritance from him.

But the father secretly wept many tears, all the tears of his old wrinkled eyelids. Every line of his old face was washed with tears, his aged cheeks were soaked with his grieving. His son was gone and he needed all the love of the remaining son to make up for the sorrow of the separation.

But he had an intuition that perhaps he had not lost his son forever, his second-born, that before his death he would have the happiness to kiss him again, and this idea helped him to endure the loneliness.

In the meantime the young man drew rapidly near to the rich city of revels where he meant to live. At every turning of the road he felt of the money-bags which hung at either side of his saddle. He soon arrived at the city of his desire and began his feasting. It seemed to him that those thousands of coins would last forever. He rented a fine house, bought five or six slaves, dressed like a prince, and soon had men and women friends who were guests at his table, and who drank his wine till their stomachs could hold no more. He did not economize with women and chose the most beautiful he could find, those who knew how to dance and sing and dress with magnificence, and undress with grace. No presents seemed too fine or too rich to please those bodies which abandoned themselves with such voluptuous softness, and which gave him the wildest, most torturing pleasure. The little provincial lord from the dull country, represented in the most sensual period of his life, vented his voluptuousness, his love of luxury, in this dangerous life.

Such a life could not go on forever: the money bags of the prodigal son were not bottomless—no money bags are—and there came a day when there was neither gold or silver, and not even copper, but only empty bags of canvas and leather lying limp and flabby on the brick floor of his room. His friends disappeared, his women disappeared, his slaves, his dining-tables were sold. With the proceeds he had enough to buy food, but only for a short time. To complete his misfortune, a famine came on the country and the prodigal son found himself hungering in the midst of a famine-stricken people. The women had gone off to other cities where the situation was better; the friends of his drunken night-revels had hard work to look out for themselves.

The unfortunate man, stripped and destitute, left the city, traveling with a lord who was going to the country where he had a fine estate. He begged him for work, till the lord hired him as a swine-herd because he was young and strong and hardly any one was willing to be a swine-herd. For a Jew nothing could be greater affliction than this. Even in Egypt, although animals were adored there, the only people forbidden to enter the temples were swine-herds. No father would have given his daughter to wife to a swine-herd and no man for all the gold in the world would have married the daughter of a swine-herd.

But the prodigal son had no choice and was forced to lead the herd of swine out to the pasture. He was given no pay and very little to eat, because there was only a little for any one; but there was no famine for the hogs, because they could eat anything. There were plenty of carob beans and they gorged themselves on those. Their hungry attendant enviously watched the pink and black animals rooting in the earth, chewing beans and roots, and longed to fill his stomach with the same stuff and wept remembering the abundance of his own home and his festivals in the great city. Sometimes overcome with hunger he took one of the black bean husks, from under the grunting snouts of the pigs, tempering the bitterness of his suffering with that insipid and woody food. And woe to him if his employer had seen him!

His dress was a dirty slave's smock which smelt of manure, his foot-gear a pair of worn-out sandals scarcely held together with



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rushes; on his head a faded hood. His fair young face, tanned by the sun of the hills, was thin and long, and had taken a sickly color between gray and brown.

Who was wearing now the spotless white come-spun clothes, which he had left in his brother's chest? Where now were the fair silken tunics dyed purple which he had sold for so little? His father's hired servants were better dressed than he, and they fared better than he.

Returned to his senses, he said to himself, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" Until now he had brushed away the idea of going home as soon as it had appeared. How could he bear to go back in this condition and give in to his brother after having despised his home, after having made his father weep? To return without a garment, unshod, without a penny, without the ring—the sign of liberty—uncomely, disfigured by this famished slavery, stinking and contaminated by this abominable trade, to show that the wise old neighbors were right, that his serious-minded brother was right, to bow himself at the knee of the old man whom he had left without a greeting, to return with opprobrium as a ragged fellow to the spot from which he had departed as a king! To come back to the soup-pile into which he had spit—into a house which contained nothing of his!

No, there was something of his always in his home his father! If he belonged to his father, his father belonged also to him. He was his creation, made of his flesh, issued from his seed in a moment of love. Though hurt, his father would never drive away his own flesh and blood. If he would not take him back as son, at least he would take him back as a hired servant, as a man born of another father. "I will rise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." I do not come back as a son but as a servant, a worker, and I do not ask love from you, for I have no more right to that, but only a little bread from your kitchen.

And the young man gave back the hogs to his master, and went towards his own land. He begged a piece of bread from the country people, and wept salt tears as he ate this bread of pity and charity in the shadow of the gycamores. His sore and blistered feet could scarcely carry him. He was barefoot now, but his faith in forgiveness led him homeward step by step.

And finally one day at noon he arrived in sight of his father's house; but he did not dare to knock, nor to call any one, nor to go in. He hung around outside to see if any one would come out. And behold, his father appeared on the threshold. His son was no longer the same, was changed, but the eyes of a father even dimmed by weeping could not fail to recognize him. He ran towards him and caught him to his breast, and kissed him and kissed him again, and could not

stop from pressing his pale, old lips on that ravaged face, on those eyes whose expression was altered but still beautiful, on that hair, dusty but still waving and soft, on that flesh that was his own.

The son, covered with confusion and deeply moved, did not know how to respond to these kisses, and

as soon as he could free himself from his father's arms he threw himself on the ground and repeated tremulously the speech he had prepared. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

TO BE CONTINUED

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