

# A LITTLE ST. AGNES.

When Gerard Foster consented to fresco the walls of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament it was as much a surprise for him as it was a surprise and a cause for chagrin to some others, and for the same reason—because there seemed such a sad incongruity between his doing the work and a fact pretty well known in the village of Pleasant Valley, the fact of his absolute agnosticism.

It happened this way, his being asked to do the work and his consenting; the church, as far as its mere erection went, had long been finished; but when the time came for its interior decoration there was a pause. Father Bouchard was a man whose artistic sensibilities were as keen as his heart was holy. As a youth he had been about to enter the Paris Ecole des Beaux Arts when he took the other resolution to enter a theological seminary. But memories and love of the old world treasures of immortal art still clung to him, and now that he had succeeded in having a fair tabernacle built to the honor of God, he did not intend to have his harmony in stone marred by such a discord as bad painting on its walls would make. Of course, there was no native genius in Pleasant Valley who could be trusted to realize the pastor's ideals. Nor was there money enough in the treasury to justify bringing an artist from New York or Boston, so the work was left undone.

When some of the impatient parishioners urged its completion by what meagre local talent there was, and a few grumbled and wondered if Father Bouchard did not have "some notions too high for us simple folk of Pleasant Valley," Father Bouchard smiled and said he was praying to that first painter, St. Luke, to send them an artist. (After he made arrangements with Gerard Foster to do the work, he reproached St. Luke for not sending him one with more of the grace of God in his heart.)

Whatever St. Luke had to do with it, Foster would certainly have explained his presence there differently. Two reasons, he would have said, drifted him thither. First, he went seeking health after his serious illness—Pleasant Valley was supposed to be a hot-bed of salubrity. Secondly, he was so thoroughly sick and tired of everything and place he knew. In Paris and every other metropolis where study and pleasure led him he had drunk to the dregs the cup of mad intoxication. At thirty-five he was suffering fatally from satiety. So when he heard of the little village, he went there endeavoring to get utterly away from the palling, unsatisfying old life, — that, indeed, had given him success, as far as the acknowledged skill of his brush went, but which had, he was beginning to realize, been so meagre in actual gratification. He was weary of it all. He scarcely hoped his spirits would heal there. But he hoped the body would, and in his desperation all he asked for his mind was a kind of forgetfulness which, in a sardonic humor he grimly promised himself, the monotonous and primitive simplicity of the village life would induce, — drugging him as it were. When he had been there about a month, at least one of his purposes began to be realized. His strength began to return. After sitting there several weeks on the veranda, looking away over the fields and across to the hills, whose gentle, graceful uprise made the valley, he began to be able to take short walks over the meadows, and then tramps up the hills.

As for his mind, with his innate turn for psychology he derived much amusement from its condition. For he was gradually lapsing into that state of placidity which he and his old fellow-students used to characterize scoffingly as "bovine." There was not positive happiness, but the bitter discontent and unrest were being succeeded by a quiet indifference that amused him, while it soothed. He said to himself that he was beginning to comprehend the delightful insouciance of the lilies of the field. By his complete isolation, as well as his deliberate desire to forget, the burdens, worries and excitement of the old wild life were beginning to fall from him as unloosened fetters. Sometimes, as he sat there, looking over the final landscape before and around him, he would murmur to himself:

"There is no world  
But this—of fields,  
Flowers and fields, and birds a-dit  
And clouds that soar  
Silently o'er  
The sunny infinite."

It grew to be so that he scarcely thought of the old times, save when Father Bouchard came to visit—as somehow he did more frequently since Foster had begun to board there. For beside the fact that the dear shepherd felt that every one in the village was in his flock—did not even the stray ones belong to his Master?—there were other reasons for his liking to stop there for a chat with Foster. For it was an old, sweet delight to hear some one talk again of the pictures and sculptures he loved and used to know. And then it was interesting to hear of the work of the new schools. Besides he felt that Foster must pine now and then to talk of these things, and there was not a multitude of the inner circle in Pleasant Valley, though it was not sunk in primitive ignorance. So many an evening as Foster was sitting smoking, Father Bouchard would come along, and the two—the jaded man of the world and the great strong pastor—would sit almost till morning talking art, literature, and the material of both—life.

One evening when they were together and some one else had dropped in, the old thorn, the decoration of the church, came up for consideration. In a moment of generosity Foster offered to finish the walls. With his returning strength, the old desire to use the brush was beginning to tinkle his fingers. He but voiced, said Father Bouchard, a wish that had been lurking in his heart ever since he heard that some one who had exhibited at the Salon was going to summer in Pleasant Valley.

As soon as he was able Gerard Foster began his work. It half amused him, because it was a departure from his ordinary themes. Ecclesiastical art he had known—but on other men's canvases. However he knew he could do what was required of him here, and he was glad to have an opportunity to repay the good Pere Bouchard, as he called him, for his many kindnesses.

So every day or so thereafter might be seen on the scaffolding Gerard Foster, septic and blasé man-of-the-world, working away on some symbol whose value his artistic sense could apprehend, if his intellect did not approve. Often as he sat there working away, whistling some old snatch from the operas or a lilt of a student's song, he smiled at how the old comrades of the Bohemian days would laugh if they saw him—"to think old Foster would come to this!" By the end of the winter it was all finished, except a small shrine at the end of the church, to St. Agnes. Just as he was about to begin work on this an attack of his former exhaustion came upon him. He had to discontinue, and spend some time in a sick bed. When strength to be out returned, there did not immediately follow the power to work. In fact, the weeks began to slip past without his feeling able to use arm and pigment, and mind, which is guide for both. And with this failure of energy to assert itself again, there reappeared the old depression, to which he used to be a victim, when it seemed so futile to hope to achieve anything worth while. All his former weariness with things haunted him again, till once more he was in that slough of despair from which he had hoped himself rescued—that bitter slough whence, if it were not for his mother, he would have actually gone deliberately down to the river and cast himself upon its breast to be borne forth upon the Life Beyond, of which he could formulate nothing, and therefore hope nothing. . . . To cap his unhappy state, the elements were against him. The sun of spring, much belated, seemed to have been thwarted in its longed-for journey northward. Continual rains made nearly every day gloomy. The sun seemed to have forgotten how to break through the clouds. When his unhappy moods returned to him, he at first thought they came from physical exhaustion, and that he would shortly be able to take up his work where he left it off. But when the days went on and his mental indisposition intensified, he began to grow impatient. Besides he was compunctious about the shrine, which he promised for Easter.

During his several months' work, he had been amused at how much church history he had learned as he browsed around Father Bouchard's library for data and symbols. Now his attention had to be fastened on the character of St. Agnes. Foster had hitherto known nothing about the saints, and cared less. It seemed inconsistent that he was to portray

something to edify those who did believe. It seemed almost a mockery. Again he laughed at how diverted the old friends would be at the situation.

However laugh as they or he might, the story of St. Agnes he had read and thought so much about that the poetry of her brief history had made an impression upon him. But he had not found the exact way he wished to present it.

One night after he had been making sketches, he went to sleep and dreamed that he saw her. The next morning, as he woke early, the sun was shining through his window, repentant as it were for its long desertion of the earth. Being unable to get back to sleep, he rose and started on a constitutional across the meadows. The morning was one of those first of spring, full of surprises and delights. Every thing seemed washed clean by the recent rains. New blades of grass shone as the sunbeams fell across them. The old earth seemed to have had a bath in some fountain of youth, everything seemed so fresh and green. Foster had not felt so invigorated for ages—as he walked along, he said half aloud:—

"Make me over, Mother April,  
When the sap begins to stir,  
When thy flowery hand delivers  
All the mountain prisoned rivers,  
And thy great heart beats and quivers  
To revive the days that were."

He took a long run across the country, and on his way back he happened to pass the church. Since his several weeks' illness he had not been there. He thought he would look in and see how things seemed now. With the glow of his walk upon him, he said to himself: "By Jove, I feel so new and strong and benevolent, I could go in and sing the doxology. That tramp in the clean grass makes me feel almost like a catechumen."

Mass was being celebrated. It was the first early Mass he had ever seen, and the spectacle quite appealed to him. Here was, indeed, a realization of that idyllic, primitive celebration Walter Pater makes Marius the Epicurean attend, and the beauty of it took possession of him as it had done of Marius. A deeper sense of what this ceremony stood for came over him as in the quiet of the morning the priest in white robes went to and fro upon the white altar, where the pure flames of the candles burned, and the few devotees wrapped in prayer and worship paid morning homage to the God, their God, whom he did not know. . . . But somehow, it came over him that it was actually to a God, and that this solemn, yet sincere, ceremonial going on there at the altar, was not all mummery as the pomp and ceremonial on some of the great feasts days in the old world churches had seemed to him.

As the intensity of his first impression cooled a little, he glanced about the building. His eyes passed a few seats in front of him; there near him, the publican and sinner, a young girl was kneeling. The sunlight coming in one of the windows fell upon her; it lighted her face and wove her hair into an aureole around her. Foster nearly threw up his cap and shouted—a little saint Agnes! . . . It was a divine moment of inspiration! Wild projects streamed through his brain. If she would only kneel that way a little while, he could catch that expression, that pose. Never had his hardened heart, full of unbelief as it was, conceived such an expression, so glorified by an aspiration, a love, he knew nothing about. Heavens! If he could only reproduce that pure fervor his shrine of the little St. Agnes would be famous, it would surely make people pray, it would—oh, if he could only get her to kneel there for him—perhaps Father Bouchard could persuade her—but what woman could keep or assume such an expression to order. No he must get it distinctly into his memory and conjure it again with the aid of his imagination. He lingered till Mass was over, then he hurried home like mad and gathered what things he needed. He was at work in a short time. That day more of the old glow of his first efforts in art's service was upon him than he had known for a long time.

The next few mornings he went to Mass. One morning, he met Father MacLean, the assistant, who said to him: "You don't get to work this early, do you? You know Mass is being celebrated just now." "I'm going to Mass," answered Foster with a twinkle in his eye that baffled the young priest. "Aren't you afraid we'll make a Catholic of you, if you do such things?" "Not much afraid, wish you could," said Foster.

There in the same place, when he went in, was his unconscious model. There was a great charm about her face; simplicity and purity were its

keynotes, a spirituality he had never seen before illuminating it, and adding to it a certain intellectuality he had not hitherto known, though his friendships had been with women whose mental calibre had undefinable distinction. That was the thing that first set him thinking—her unmistakable, cool intelligence about what she was doing and about what was about going forward on the altar. He began to meditate how strange it was considering all the ages, all the centuries piled on centuries between them, that there were two women, one far away in the first dawn of the religion of Christ, one in twenty hundredth year thereafter, apparently feeling the same exaltation, the same devotion to Him whom he had but vaguely known as the great man of Galilee. Product of an age, a locality, and a family which had drifted from the old moorings, Gerard Foster had come in contact but very indirectly with Christianity and its teachings. The story of Jesus Christ had been to him in his career, which he deemed a very real, intense life, but which was really but an undeveloped dream, the history of some mysterious, powerful philanthropist of un-usual psychic power, interesting indeed, but the possible divinity of this force he scarcely considered—till now when it was thrust upon him, as it were. What a strange thing it was that the persuasion to which Agnes had been a martyr in that old far-off time still endured, still had its supporters! As he watches his "little saint Agnes" praying at the Consecration, he knew her devotion would not flinch from the severest ordeal for what she was worshipping there on the altar. It was the first ray athwart the darkness—what then did happen in Galilee? over and over he began thinking. It lent a grave quality to his work as he continued finishing the shrine, a reverence to his presentation of what he was just beginning to comprehend.

When the shrine was completed and Father Bouchard was grateful beyond his expectations, he was also baffled beyond comprehension at how a man with ideas such as Gerard Foster had honestly confessed, had been able to grasp and depict with his brush that impalpable spiritual beauty born only of an exaltation, which he had felt sure was an unknown quantity to Gerard Foster. Yet there was a quality in his light and tone that Father Bouchard knew only too well came not from mere artistic composition, but from an innate spirituality—Raphael and others in "the day-spring of art so fresh and dewy" had worked it in with their pigments.

About a year after this, Foster returned to Pleasant Valley. He had been abroad again, but had come back to Father Bouchard to be baptized. The morning of his First Communion he lingered in the church after every one else had gone. As he stayed there making a long thanksgiving, wrapped in the comfort and the joy of it, the sacristan came out to drape the church,—there was to be a funeral.

After a few minutes, the funeral procession came into the church. Very sweetly the organist was playing the Chopin march. Across the aisle and pews was borne to him the fragrance of flowers. It was the first service for the departed he had ever attended, and the beauty of it made a profound impression upon him. He said to himself: "you've come to the best port, old man, whence to embark for eternity." As the Mass went on, he grew a little exhausted, having had no breakfast, but he did not like to leave. As his attention flagged a little he glanced about the church, his eyes falling upon his own work, and he lived again some of his old life; then his coming to Pleasant Valley and his conversion came before his mental vision. As his eyes rested on the shrine of St. Agnes, spontaneously they passed to the pew whence he had received his inspiration—the "little Saint Agnes" was not there. He thought again of how she had been not only his inspiration, but the sweet instrument, as it were, of his conversion, first revealing to him a faith he had not realized before. He felt that he would like to see her again. She was probably some girl of the village, but no matter, he felt he would like to see her, perhaps know her. Once again the tones of the Marche Funebre came plaintively from the organ loft, distracting his thought. He glanced at the cortège. It was apparently a young person there borne out under all the white flowers, perhaps. . . . she?

One afternoon later he strayed into the church, thinking he would look over his work critically. It had been finished long enough for him to get the right perspective. As he entered the church he saw an old man and woman standing in front of the shrine he had decorated. As he drew near, looking intensely

at what power he had put into it. "I wish some of the fellows could see it; I believe it would convert them!" As he drew closer, he observed the aged couple. The woman was crying; he heard her say: "Isn't it like her? I feel as if I could just come here every day and almost have her back again." Foster bent his head and passed into a pew. "O little Saint Agnes, thank God that once at least my brush has been true, thank Him that you led me to His feet." — Anna Blance McGill, in Donahoe's Magazine.

tain elements on human character, while he loses sight oftentimes of the most important ones; frequently he has worked himself out of belief in religion as important and is seeking for something to take its place. There is a disadvantage, also, or a danger, that by method or methodizing one becomes machine-like in school work and consequently loses the personality which in its enthusiasm, sympathy and power, constitutes the real teaching influence. After all these disadvantages in methods are insignificant in comparison with the good, general results that come from training. The benefits are so great that they leave no doubt as to the necessity for such institutions.

Philosophy has an important part to play in the principles that underlie pedagogical studies. After all, it is important to thoroughly understand child-character and direct in the ways that lead to true manhood. There is a great deal of false philosophy serving as a basis for many modern systems of education. A false philosophy misinterprets soul-life, gives us character study without the sunlight that comes from eternal truth. Human nature can never be properly understood except under the great searchlight of revealed truth by which the evils resulting from the original lapse from integrity and the benefits accruing from Redemption and Justification through grace can be properly understood. The true idea of manhood is based upon the true idea of life. Educational training demands that the end of existence be definitely understood and the natural in man be each fully appreciated. We must never forget that we are not only human but also Christian, and that therefore the aim of education is the formation of man according to Christian ideas. It is the development of the Christian in man. Philosophy gives us the unity in education. We must have harmony in life and since religion is a necessity to our nature we cannot separate one from the other.

No training of teachers can be complete without correct principles of philosophy and psychology and Christianity alone can give these principles. Our teachers should be thoroughly grounded in them. Teachers are not developed by intuition; they are not fitted by mere vocation; they come to their place in work through the hard labor of patient study and careful training. They need to be familiarized with the history of education as presented by all sections of the world of thought. They need particularly the history of the science they have to teach; they should be in touch with all parts of it. The teacher in the Catholic school should, above all, be thoroughly indoctrinated with the idea that the only true education is according to the Catholic ideal. He should understand thoroughly the reason of difference between the Catholic and non-Catholic systems of education, be thoroughly convinced that the Catholic system of intellectual and moral training alone can give that strength and power to character which makes true education.

Then again, there is the grading of schools by which work is consolidated, one piece fitting into another, one part adjusted to another, and all building according to a certain general well-defined plan. This creates competition; it develops comparison of education the necessity to have each part of the work equally well done. All this demands method and method is improved by training. After all, no matter how much we may seek for reasons by which to explain the educational facts we have noted, the chief reason with which we have to concern ourselves is that the work of education depends on the training of teachers. The teacher makes the school, the teacher is the school. Cardinal Newman had a favorite expression, "Give us universities in tents or shanties, but give us teachers." Without the teacher, buildings are of little account. You may have well-selected libraries, handsomely equipped laboratories, extensive buildings, but if you have not well-prepared teachers in them, you will never reach the honor mark in education. The teacher is one of the most potent factors in our modern life. The demand for skilled labor, the necessity for well informed minds in every department of activity, grows greater and greater and the teacher becomes the instrument by which mind is trained, knowledge acquired and skill is developed.

The teacher's vocation calls for the best training possible. It asks that opportunities be given him in all professions to become not only thoroughly familiar with what he has to teach, but equally familiar with the best methods of teaching it. There are other disadvantages in the training of teachers which may be noticed. There is the everlasting faddist with his whims and caprices interjecting himself into all the methods of instruction; he is full of belief in himself and is constantly liable to change. There is the experimentalist, ever asking for the testing of some new plan either in book or exercise, constantly exposing the pupils to the uncertainties as to what they are afterwards to use as the best in methods; full of theories, he is constantly changing methods only to find that what was adopted yesterday must be superseded by what he finds to-day. Experimentalism is necessary as a test of methods, but there is no experimentalism in education. But the modern experimentalist is not satisfied to be limited by methods, but seems to drift largely towards his own peculiar views as to the influence of cer-

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The insuring of one's life is one of those things which one is most apt to put off. There are few, however, who postpone what ought to be the inevitable until so late a period in life as did the tough old smack-owner of Grimby. When he presented himself at the insurance office he was naturally asked his age. His reply was "Ninety-four." "Why, my good man, we cannot insure you," said the Company. "Why not?" he demanded. "Why, you are ninety-four years of age." "What of that?" the old man cried. "Look at statistics, and they will tell you that fewer men die at ninety-four than at any other age."—Business Illustrated.

A PRIEST COMPOSER'S EARNINGS.

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AN AGED PRELATE.

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## Qualification of the Catholic Teacher.

In the address which he delivered before the recent convention of Catholic educationists in Chicago, the Right Rev. Thomas J. Conaty, Rector of the Catholic University, Washington, said in part:—

Teaching has become a profession, with a standard of character and ability, second to no other. We are at the moment when there is a quality demanded in the teacher which cannot be acquired by mere habit or ordinary experience. It calls for a fitting for the work commensurate with its importance, and the acquisition of learning and a high grade of scholarship, as well as the use of the best methods, will alone reach the end required. The competition among candidates is so strong and the tendency towards meritorious standards is so great that people are anxious to spend time and money in obtaining that education which will best fit them to honor their profession.

Then again, the question of method has been placed in the fore-rank of qualifications for successful work. Familiarity with the means by which successful teachers reach great results, the clearer definition of principles, the surer means of imparting knowledge, the application of it in the school-room, all these speak of method and require method. The iron laws of business are being applied to education. Everything is done by system, everything is in order and the largest share of benefits comes to the largest number.

Then again, there is the grading of schools by which work is consolidated, one piece fitting into another, one part adjusted to another, and all building according to a certain general well-defined plan. This creates competition; it develops comparison of education the necessity to have each part of the work equally well done. All this demands method and method is improved by training. After all, no matter how much we may seek for reasons by which to explain the educational facts we have noted, the chief reason with which we have to concern ourselves is that the work of education depends on the training of teachers. The teacher makes the school, the teacher is the school. Cardinal Newman had a favorite expression, "Give us universities in tents or shanties, but give us teachers." Without the teacher, buildings are of little account. You may have well-selected libraries, handsomely equipped laboratories, extensive buildings, but if you have not well-prepared teachers in them, you will never reach the honor mark in education. The teacher is one of the most potent factors in our modern life. The demand for skilled labor, the necessity for well informed minds in every department of activity, grows greater and greater and the teacher becomes the instrument by which mind is trained, knowledge acquired and skill is developed.

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