

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS. THE STORY OF LITTLE BLANCHE

A Breton Tale. H. Horn, S. J., in American Messenger of the Sacred Heart for November. THE ATHEIST AND LITTLE BLANCHE.

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.

Next night she was more feeble than ever, but she began again, "Papa, do you think God will make me better?" He paused for a second, then said, "I think He ought to do so." She waited a minute, then said, "Papa, if I die do you think I shall go to Heaven?" "Yes," he replied almost involuntarily. "I am sure you will." "I shall so want to see you come, Pa," she said, and sank back exhausted.

That same night he sat beside her, and for the first time he saw that speech was beyond her. He sat down at the bedside and took her little white hand in his. The diamond pines of the window were shadowed by the moon into the corner of the room. The patch of light moved slowly across the wall and lit up in its passage the pale, lifeless face of the little one on the bed. Then it moved along and had reached the other corner, but the father still sat with his face turned to the window. Was he asleep? Did he not know that the hand he clasped in his was dead? Yes, he knew it, indeed. He had felt the pulse stop. He felt the hand growing cold, but he dared not look; he dared not stir. His little Blanche was dead. What was he thinking of as he sat with his brow set and his body motionless? Had grief robbed him of sense? Was he unconscious and dreaming of happiness now passed? No, he was quite conscious. He had expected the little life that was all the world to him to go that night. It had gone, and now he was realizing his loss. He was running over in his mind all her words, all her habits, all, in fact, that he knew of her. He was talking again to her in the library. He was listening to her prattle. She was asking him again to bless her. Then he remembered that there must be a funeral. Where? At the church? Should he not take her up in his arms, and go and bury her in his own woods, where he might go daily and mourn over her grave? Should she be buried in the churchyard, the place of all places that he never passed through? No, that could not be. Then there rushed upon him a flood of old memories. How years before, he had stood beside a little sister's grave, while the priest had blessed it, and there had been white flowers put upon the sod, and all had said that she had gone straight to Heaven. Yes, he would like people to say that of his little Blanche and—stronger reason still—Blanche herself would have liked it. Yes, she must be buried in the churchyard. She must be looked on with kindly eyes by the country people. What ever he was, his little girl should not be thought an outcast and a sinner. So he wandered on in thought, ever sitting quite still, until the rays of morning began to glimmer and the moonlight began to fade. Then he rose heavily, took one long look at the little form on the bed, kissed the cold brow, and with teeth clenched to stop the rising sobs, walked out of the room.

The news of Blanche's death soon became known in all the country round. It was a great subject of talk for all the villagers that the atheist's daughter was dead and was going to be buried in the churchyard. Children had endless questions to ask their mothers about the bad man's daughter. "Was she a terrible little hunchback?" "Had the devil come and carried her straight off to hell?" "Had the atheist murdered her, perhaps?" Some good old Breton mothers, quite as ignorant as their children, were not at all sure that something of the kind had not happened. Others took a middle course and told the inquirers that the little dead girl had had such a bad bringing up that she could not be bad, but that a great part of it was not her fault. While others again of the more enlightened sort said that they had no doubt that the little thing had gone straight to Heaven, as she had been too young to do any harm. This view was backed up by some of the little peasant lads, who said that they had caught sight of the atheist's daughter plucking flowers one day, and that she had looked "quite good and just like other little girls." So with these stout supporters, and the favorable opinions of many of the better folk of the neighborhood to boot, little Blanche became quite well known and pitied by all the country side. That she had been quite good was soon generally admitted. In fact, she had died because God did not want her to become an atheist like her father. Only one thing was still considered quite probable—that her father had killed her, and they thought that the gendarmes ought to be sent to investigate the matter.

So when the day of the funeral came, all the little folk of the country were a-stray, and were waiting at a safe distance from the dark woods of the chateau to meet the little funeral cortege. They had heard from M. le Curé that the atheist was not to be there (as they had expected he would not for their own reasons) so they all followed close upon the single hearse, accompanied as it otherwise was, only by one or two grim-looking hired servants. So Blanche, closed up in her narrow box, was surrounded by the first time by a crowd of sympathetic little friends, who little knew how she

had often thought about them, and longed to join them, when she saw them playing in the distance. They were all very reverential as they formed into their self-arranged procession. Many of them clasped their small hands—that being the way most familiar to them of showing that they were engaged in a religious ceremony.

There was a tiny little grave under a chestnut tree in the cemetery at the church door, and into this the body of the atheist's daughter was lowered, amid the groups of children, and the prayers were said, and so many blessings repeated over Blanche's head that her little soul must have been well satisfied. Then they threw sods on and the mourners moved off, and as they walked away the chattering recommenced, and they trooped into school to wonder over the paradox of an atheist having a daughter in Heaven.

The library now in the evening was much the same as before. The old journalist sat on his chair, and his manuscript lay on the big table. He did not get up to light his lamp when dusk set in, but sat on in the firelight. Then came his moments of sorrow and loneliness. "I might as well die now," muttered the old man to himself, "it's hard to live on with no one to care for you. It's a hard thing to think that all human solace is gone for me. Shall I get married again? Married! No! he burst out passionately. "It is not any hand that can soothe me. It is a tiny hand I want. That is what I shall never get again. Never feel that little arm around my neck. Never hear that little step again. Why could not that one little life have been left to me? Why of all the little ones that might have been taken was this, my little one chosen—the one that could so ill be spared—that made my life was happy—that made me feel that I was not alone. Oh! for that little hand once more." Then he walked to the window and with a choking sensation in his throat, tapped on the frame, and muttered "God bless my little Blanche."

So night after night as the dusk came on, the old atheist might have been seen standing at his library window, muttering "God bless my little Blanche," and doubtless the nightly blessing as it rose up to the soul that needed it not, fell back on the head of the father who uttered it.

It was six months after the events I have been relating, that I came once again to the country of my childhood. I got out at the station and walked along the old rough road which led past the graveyard. There were some children playing at the gate. I passed among them, to look over the wall at the spot beneath the tree where I knew my little friend of the Chateau Noir was buried. What was my surprise when I saw beside the tomb a grey-haired man, bare-headed and evidently praying. The tears came into my eyes as it flashed across my mind that this must be the atheist, brought to a sense of a holier faith by his little dead daughter. I approached cautiously. His eyes were closed and he did not observe me. He had put his head upon the white tombstone, and was leaning his sorrow-stricken brow against it.

I crept quietly up and looked at the stone. It was a plain white marble slab, with no date or circumstances inscribed upon it, but only the words "God bless my little Blanche." My heart felt quite full as I crept quietly back to the gate. The little group of players were looking at me with wonder, as much as to say, "Don't you know the story?" I knew most of it, and I guessed the rest, but I had to hear it all over again from the ready little gossips. "It's M. L'athe, they burst out as I came quietly up to the gate, 'he's praying for his little Blanche.'" "No, he isn't," interrupted some more advanced theologians; "he's praying to her; she does not need praying for." "He's so good now, as M. L'athe." "His little Blanche, as soon as she got to Heaven, set to work praying for him, and he has been made quite a good man." "We're not a bit afraid of him, now," cried another with an air of pride. "I should think not," they all chimed in. "He's patted me on the head," said one. "I make him bunches of flowers, and he gives me sixpences for them," said another. In fact, it was evident that the atheist was a general favorite among the juvenile group.

The old atheist had been quite converted by the death of his little daughter. He had been found one morning praying at the grave of his little girl as I had found him, and the news had spread like wild fire through the country. There had been quite a gathering at times round the gate, watching the head bent in prayer. But the length of his prayers: generally tired even these curious watchers out, and he was in solitude as he walked back in the evening to the Chateau Noir. Then a new face had appeared in the village church, and for one Sunday at least, the congregation had been perfectly oblivious of everything else, save the presence of the converted atheist in the sacred building. Gradually the interdiction was raised from the Chateau Noir, and the woods became no longer the haunt of demons. There were soon short cuts taken through them, and old disused paths were reopened.

Another year elapsed before I again visited this part of the country. I stepped up to the churchyard, as before, and looked over the wall, half expecting to see the old man at his prayers. But the grave was deserted. I walked up, and on the stone I saw that a change had been made. Underneath the words "God bless my little Blanche," "God bless and pardon her Father" had been carved. My little group of friends were not at the gate this time, but I met some of them further down the road, and learnt the details of the atheist's death. He had been found one autumn morning lying stiff and lifeless on the tomb of his little girl. He had evidently been there all night, for the snow and leaves had drifted up and formed a shroud round about him.

For some time he had been growing feeble, and probably the cold of the evening had caused a fainting fit from which he had been unable to recover. So the two bodies were laid in one grave, and the two souls were doubtless united in heaven.

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN

Railroad Men Always at School.

On the railroad men go to school all their lives. They never get too old to go. Whenever there comes into use any innovation that requires technical knowledge, such as the air brake, or whenever there is a change in any of the commonly used codes, such as the hand signals used by trainmen the men are divided into squads and sent to division headquarters for special instruction. These places are known among railroad men as "schools." The methods employed combine those in use in the kindergarten, the primary department and the High school.

Perhaps the most interesting railroad school is the one sent out by the Westinghouse company to confer upon railroad men the final degrees in the process of learning the air brake. This school is on wheels, and in the three years that it has been in service has travelled twice the distance of the circumference of the world, and granted certificates to nearly 218,000 railroad men. The instruction car is packed full of every kind of appliance and fitting and model that will be found in any train of thirty cars. The car is in charge of competent lecturers, and every railroad employee who has anything to do with the actual handling of engines or cars is required to attend. Engineers, firemen, conductors, trainmen, galvanizers and hostlers all have their separate classes, and the conditions in the car are as nearly as possible like those they meet every day. Here in the car, however, the different parts are so arranged that they can be taken apart and viewed in section, and used to illustrate the lecture.

The men who conduct these lectures speak the vernacular of the railroad, and their talk is not always a model of good grammar and rhetoric; but what they say is practical and easily understood. Moreover, the men feel that the lecturer has actually sat in an engine and gone down a long grade with a heavy train, or that he has crawled around on the ground to fit hose. After the lecture is over the class passes into another car and is examined. There is something strangely familiar about the way these big-bearded fellows hitch their shoulders and wriggle when they are called upon to recite. This school, by the way, has engagements that will require three years to fill. There is now on its way to this country a band of German mechanics who are coming over to learn the air brake, and it is probable that they will take their degrees here.

In an item headed "Murphy's Lantern" the Lexington (Ky.) Leader tells how Superintendent W. J. Murphy of the Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific examines his trainmen on their proficiency in the train rules. He uses a stereopticon to show pictures of life-size signals of all kinds—semaphores and other fixed signals, trains with markets, classification signals, and in fact almost anything else that the men will ever be called upon to translate. Various men have various methods, although it is doubtful if many superintendents go to the length of helping the men out with lantern slides. When it comes to examining the men in hand signals the superintendent usually calls in a subordinate and says: "Here, Jim, take these men out to school." Then Jim takes them out in the yard, gives them a train to break up in a dozen different switches, and soon has them waving themselves wild. Their engineer is extremely literal; he keeps his eyes glued on them, taking nothing for granted. The men get no help or sympathy from Jim, and altogether the test is apt to be more severe than

anything they will ever run up against in actual service. Almost all of the operators of the block signal service, which has come into use on most of the big roads, are youngsters and wherever one of them happens to be stationed he manages to attract a considerable body of youthful admirers. A bright boy in a tower will pick up telegraphy in a short time, and it is from these that the ranks of the tower operators are kept filled. As a matter of fact, almost all of the operators in the country to-day have picked up telegraphy themselves. Before the boy gets a chance, however, he has to go to school at division headquarters, where the chief of the service examines him in telegraphy on the electric bell code, and tries to "stick" him with original problems.

Patient Effort.

There seems to be increasing difficulty in getting young men to engage in hard study and the patient effort which is necessary to the conquest of any real branch of learning. It is easy to point out to them the remarkable success obtained by unlettered youths who through patient study made names for themselves in literature, art or the sciences; but boys of the present generation are imbued with the ideas that are expressed in special machinery. They want to do things in the shortest possible period of time and with the least possible expenditure of effort. They argue with some reason, but not enough to be convincing, that the development of the arts and sciences has been so great that there is no longer any necessity to study first principles. Photography takes the place of skill in drawing; machine tools replace tedious hand labor. Why, then, should any one give long years of apprenticeship to arts and industries that have been revolutionized by modern inventions? But there is a weak point in their argument. There is still, and always will be, a great demand for the artist who can draw accurately and, and for the mechanic who can fashion things by hand. The optical, chemical and mechanical appliances that have come into use in recent years to simplify and cheapen production have stimulated consumption, and there is as great demand as ever for the man who can, so to say, create, who is independent of machines and processes. The artist who is dependent upon photographs is a mere "hewer of wood and drawer of water," compared with the artist who designs and draws; the machinist who is dependent upon the lathe or milling machine is helpless by comparison with the bench hand.

In the domain of literature and science the same thing is true. One may obtain place to day in the ranks of literature and science without that broad knowledge to be obtained only by patient effort, but it is an inferior place and bears no comparison with the honors and emoluments to be won by those who have by patient study and the use of native powers obtained mastery in their special field of learning.

There is as much need as ever of patient effort by those who would rise to the head of their profession or calling. If they are contented with an inferior place they may get along in the worldly sense by some lucky speculation or fortunate move, but they will not command success, nor even often attain it.

The men who succeed are in general the men who are patiently studious, the men who ground themselves thoroughly for some special calling and devote all their efforts not so much to gaining rewards as to deserving them. The man whose motive for effort lies in the price to be won, seldom has the patience to prepare to win it; the man whose motive it is to do good work, to accomplish for the present the best of which he is capable, is the man who builds up character and reputation alike and sooner or later reaches the goal of his ambition. The world has reached a feverish and impatient age, an age of daring speculation, but it has not yet reached an age when it can do without the men who know, the men who have by patient effort mastered the art of the science they have chosen for their special study. Patient effort is still the surest means of success in life.

DISCOURAGEMENT.

One of the most active, persistent and successful agents of Lucifer is the Devil of Discouragement.

To every one who is doing good in a place intended for him by Divine Providence the Devil of Discouragement comes and whispers over and over again: "You are lost here and you are wasting time. How much better off you would be if you were over there! You could do so much more there. Besides, you're not appreciated where you are. If you were gone, you'd have no such vexations and those who now set little value on your services would learn to prize you at your true worth. No wonder you lose heart here!"

This poison of discouragement the evil spirit endeavors to inject into those whom he hopes to make his victims, and day after day he says the same thing, taking advantage of every little annoyance, every supposed slight, every short-coming of neighbors, every partial failure, every report of triumphs wrought by others. If the tempted give up the work appointed them, desert the place assigned to them, and set out on a career for which they have no divine calling, they are undone; for, unforeseen difficulties will arise, which will be used by the Devil of Discouragement to instill further dissatisfaction and more hopelessness, until his thralls abandon

effort and yield themselves a prey to bitterness, mutinous against God, despair and impotence.

So, the question is not—Could we do more good, or be more happy, or acquire more virtue, as something else besides what Heaven made us or in some other place, or at some other employment than what have been allotted to us? No, the question is: Are we where our vocation wants us to be? If so, let us make the best of it and the most of ourselves, right there, whether it be conspicuous or obscure, laborious or leisurely, for there is where we are needed, there is where we can achieve the most good, there is where we can most surely speak of victories.

Let us send the Devil of Discouragement back to his master in hell, discouraged.—Catholic Columbian Columbus.

A PRIEST'S EDUCATION.

He Should Be Learned in an Academic Sense—Science as Well as Sanctity Needed.

In a circular letter to his clergy, Monsignor Mignot, Archbishop of Albi, lays down what the priest of the hour should know. This prelate is an authority on the subject of which he treats, for he is considered to be the most learned one in France, says an exchange. He is looked upon, moreover, as the one the most in the van of modern thought. According to him, the priest of the hour should be as deeply versed in classical knowledge as were his elders in previous generations of the priesthood. Besides Latin, he should have at least a good knowledge of Greek. He should be learned in the academic sense. From this it will be seen that Monsignor Mignot concedes to modern exigencies no iota of the traditional character of a priest's education. According to him the modern priest must be what the best before him have been in the matter of learning. But he must be something besides. After poring over Greek and Latin he must bring his mind on a level with the discoveries of the age. He must be versed in natural as in sacred science. By a few splendid strokes of the pen the Archbishop of Albi traces the progress of modern science. He shows how the heavens and the earth have in times revealed their secrets, upsetting the old order of things. In presence of this he places the priest of the hour and with the latest scientific discoveries as point of fact. "The priest nowadays," he says, "should be the most cultured man of his parish, because he is the defender of religion. He should know the ground of attack as well as that of defence. To objections unknown to our forefathers he should have ready answers. In reality, the Church instead of being the enemy of science has been its savior."

If the progress of physical science under the Church's sway was comparatively slow, Monsignor Mignot gives the reason. He shows that the Church's first object was to produce saints and learned men in the supernatural order. "But if," he says, "she did not discover the secret of the earth's motion or raise a monument in honor of physical science, she raised one incomparably more important in honor of revelation." He shows how modern scientists are indebted, as no words can tell, to the courageous efforts and silent labor of men working during long ages under the Church's shadow and often in his religious garb. Our Roger Bacon is cited as an instance, and Isaac Newton is made to say by the pen of the Archbishop of Albi that without the Abbe Picard's labors he would not have been in a position to verify the exactness of his discoveries. Admitting that modern science and the Church now work on separate lines, the Archbishop attributes this in a measure to the suppression of priests under the revolution. He shows the Church from her ruins and falling priests worthy of their sacred mission. But the time has come for something besides, he thinks. According to him the modern priest must be a man of science as well as of learning and of sanctity. "If our generation has more than ever need of holy priests, she has also need of learned ones." This remarkable address has been considerably echoed in the French press. It is likely to be a point of departure for changes in the ecclesiastical training of priests.

FILIPPINO PIETY AT CLOSE VIEW.

Mr. M. J. Dowling, a correspondent of the Minneapolis Journal, writes to that paper from Cebu in the Philippines:

"As in other towns, there are fine churches and public buildings. One of the most powerful Bishops of the Archipelago lives here in a fine palace. I saw him go down the street one day holding out his right hand, which the natives crowded around to kiss. They ran eagerly from all directions upon being told that the Bishop was passing, and fairly trampled each other under foot in an effort to touch the hem of his garment or kiss his hand. "There is a large cathedral here, a fine convent, a good seminary, a leper hospital and the most beautiful cemetery in the island. Easter Sunday in Cebu was an occasion for great festivities. One feature was a religious procession consisting of floats drawn by natives; upon these floats were arranged the most beautiful and comely of the natives to represent Christ, the apostles, the Blessed Virgin, etc., each float representing one event in the life of Christ from His birth to His crucifixion. As the procession moved slowly through the crowded streets, natives by the thousands literally buried their faces in the dust before it. A

good band furnished the music and children's voices formed numerous choirs. It was the Oberammergau Passion Play in miniature. These festivities taught me to believe that these natives are very devoted Church people, at least they pay most particular attention to the observance of holy days and the rituals of the Church."

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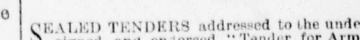
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