

A SINGER'S ROMANCE

The Warlock street flats were always dismal. On a bright day they looked more gloomy and grimy than ever, and when the sun beat down strong and yellow upon the dull red bricks it seemed to be brushing out the life and stifling the breath of the human beings who fought and struggled and laughed and wept inside.

To say the heat was almost unbearable. It beat down upon the ugly, narrow, rickety street until the poverty-stricken neighborhood appeared loathsome even to its hardened inhabitants.

In one of the flats a woman, who was little more than a girl, waded listlessly backward and forward or strummed with weary effort upon her little piano. She was pale with the heat and restless with a foreboding that entered her heart. For the first time since her marriage she felt lonely and miserable, and she had been married just six months. During that time nothing had occurred to mar the harmony of their lives. For six months they had been perfectly happy. Everything had gone smoothly. Ralph, who was a singer in one of the theatres, had had continual engagements, and although the salary he earned was very small, they had lived comfortably upon it and been content.

But now there was a gnawing fear in her thoughts—a jarring anxiety that refused to be still. She had seen Ralph grow paler and thinner day after day. She had noticed the weariness grow in his eyes, the tired look that was fast becoming habitual to his face, and she was afraid—of what she scarcely dared own even to herself: but she knew that Ralph was working too hard and that the summer heat was undermining his strength.

She sat down presently to practice. Somehow today her voice sounded clearer and stronger than it had ever done before. The keys seemed to fall with scarcely an effort beneath her fingers, and she found herself singing an old song that she had known years ago at home—a dull, pathetic little air that made her suddenly break down and sob—she scarcely knew why, except that the gloomy foreboding had gripped her heart and something in the song seemed, absurdly enough, to apply to her.

Suddenly an idea occurred to her. She sprang up with a start, her cheeks glowing with a sudden brightening in her eyes. A few minutes later she was making her way rapidly through the narrow, reeking street and out into the broader thoroughfare beyond.

She stopped before a house bearing a brass plate, and the flash in her cheeks began to fade away. She hesitated for a moment before she rang the bell, and then, in her nervousness, gave such a peal that the professor, slumbering peacefully inside, started up in fright.

"Ach, Himmel!" he remarked. "What is it?"

The reply came in the form of a neatly dressed servant, who announced that a young lady was waiting to see him, and the professor's curiosity overcame his usual dignity of manner. He gave orders that the young lady should be admitted.

Nellie came in nervously. She glanced at the big, bearded man in front of her and wished she had not been so hasty. She was more than half afraid of the professor—who had such a reputation for eccentricity—and she hesitated before she plunged into the story she had so carefully planned to tell him.

When she spoke, all her nicely worded sentences, all her carefully calculated eloquence, vanished, and she could only stammer helplessly: "I—I want to ask you," she began, "to—test my voice."

The professor smiled—a grim, significant smile—and she felt in very truth she was bearding a lion in his den.

"Oh, I know it's a strange thing to ask you to do," she said nervously, "but I thought—I thought—"

The professor grunted through his beard. "Well, well," he said gruffly. "Will you take a seat?"

"Oh, no," said Nellie excitedly. "If you please, I'd rather stand. I'm too anxious. I want to know if—my voice. I want to know if—I could make some money."

She paused. A sudden horror of her own temerity overtook her. She had come to one of the most celebrated professors of music in London and boldly asked him to test her voice. Supposing he asked her for a guinea or two for doing it? She could not pay him, and she must be told so at once.

"I think perhaps I ought not to have come," she said nervously. "I am very poor. I have no money to pay for your opinion, but—but I never thought of that when I came. I forgot—I only thought of—of Ralph—of myself."

Her voice broke a little, and when she looked up she found the professor's small, twinkling eyes keenly fixed upon her.

He said nothing. He stood immovably watching her, and as if in reply to some unuttered question, she went on.

"I was so anxious. This afternoon something worried me. I don't know what it was exactly—a sort of foreboding, and I could not help thinking. My husband, you know, sings at a theatre. He—he is not strong, and lately he seems strange, as if—as if his health was giving away. He wants rest and change. Only the other week the doctor said he ought to get away to the sea, and—and he can't do it. He only earns just enough for

us to live upon, and if—if he should be ill I don't know what we should do. I come to you to know if I could earn some money."

She stopped. The professor was still watching her.

"Well, well," he said not unkindly, "let us see. Let me hear you sing." She sat down nervously to the piano. The keys were indistinguishable before her eyes, and her fingers trembled weakly. For a moment her voice was beyond her control. She felt incapable of steadying it, and she could not remember a word to sing.

"Then she suddenly caught sight of an old song called 'Daddy' lying upon the piano and she took it up and began to play. She sang through the first verse with all the exquisite pathos of which her voice was capable. It rang out soft and clear across the room, and the professor almost fancied he dreamed.

He woke with a start to find that she had stopped and was putting back the music.

"Again," he said, harshly. "Sing it again."

She sang it through once more, and when she looked around the professor was staring out of the window, and the sight of his back turned toward her sent a chill to her heart.

"I was afraid I should be a failure," she said, with a half sob, taking her gloves. "I am sorry—I—"

He turned round at the sound of her voice. She did not know that his eyes were full of tears and that the song had conjured up recollections of his dead wife.

"Scales," he said abruptly. And Nellie went back obediently to the piano.

When she had finished, he came over himself and put her through a number of exercises. He tested her voice in every possible way. He took infinite pains with her—such pains that Nellie would have considerably astonished some of his pupils if they could have heard—and when he had finished, he looked up interestedly into her face.

"Your voice has been well trained, was all he remarked.

"I had a good master," said Nellie, with the chill growing at her heart, and he always kept up my practice. I have practiced every day since I have been married."

"Good, good!" said the professor suddenly. "Very good! And if something should turn up will you take it at once?"

Nellie caught her breath with a gasp of astonishment.

"Take it!" she cried. "Then—then, you do think—you think I can earn some money?"

"I think," said the professor, forgetting his dignity and his English, with a sudden irate gesture, "I think you have a beautiful voice—a beautiful voice!"

That afternoon Nellie waited impatiently for Ralph to come back from rehearsal. She was burning to tell him the news and to get his permission to look out for an engagement.

The professor had spoken so favorably of her voice, had given her so much encouragement, that she was filled with the widest hopes. There must be something in it. He had promised to help her out of sheer admiration for her voice, and surely it must be worth something for so great a professor to take her up.

She lay back luxuriously in her easy chair and dreamed golden dreams.

And the summer afternoon waned and passed, and still Ralph did not come. She sat up listening for his footsteps. Symphonically she was making such a noise on the stairs outside that she could hear nothing. Men—heavy booted men—seemed to be tramping up with some heavy burden. She could hear their clumsy feet clambering up; she could hear the murmur of their gruff voices, and she signed impatiently as the sounds came nearer.

Suddenly they stopped—stopped outside her door, and then there was an ominous silence. The next moment there came a knock, and a policeman looked in.

Nellie started up with a cry. The policeman came forward and tried to keep her back. Some other men followed him. There seemed to be quite a lot of men crowding into her little room, but she could see none of them distinctly—only one form that lay stretched unconscious on a shutter, and over that form she bent, with a terribly white face, and stared wildly at the narrow stream of red blood that was oozing slowly from her husband's colorless lips.

Somebody was saying something to her about Ralph. He fainted at rehearsal, and—She looked up and found the doctor speaking to her.

"The truth is the kindest after all," he said presently. "He is very dangerous only ill—so ill that I think—glance round the shabbily furnished room—'I think he ought to be removed to a hospital. He requires great care—great care. He must have a nurse, and if his life is to be saved he must be spared nothing."

Nellie looked up helplessly.

"Yes, yes," she said dully. "He shall have a nurse. He shall be spared nothing."

The doctor glanced at her curiously. He wondered what she was going to do. This pale faced girl. He had learned that her husband was an actor. He knew, too, that he earned only a small salary, and he feared more than he told her—more than he cared to put into words.

He said nothing further—he only wondered. And Nellie ordered a nurse and everything else the doctor suggested with a reckless disregard of expense.

There was no hope.

The doctor said so, but Nellie refused to believe it, and she sat by the bedside, looking eagerly into her husband's colorless face and trying to find some sign of hope—in vain. This very day he might either die or live, and the doctor had said that she must prepare for the worst. It was impossible. She could not die.

As she sat there the nurse entered and brought her a letter. Nellie looked at it indifferently. What did letters matter now? She took it in her trembling hands and tore it open wearily. As she read a sudden red flush sprang into her cheeks and a sharp light flashed into her eyes. She read on confusedly. What she read made no impression upon her at first. The letters danced before her eyes, and the words appeared stupid and meaningless, but after a minute they came clear, and she began to understand.

Mme. Lucille, the professor wrote, was unable to sing at the Albert Hall that night, and she, Nellie Underwood, was to take her place.

She looked at Ralph—ill, perhaps dying—on the bed, and then she turned back to the letter. Her chance had come at last. The chance that she had waited for so eagerly had come at last like a wonderful miracle or else like a fish-and-chick trick.

She looked at it for a moment longer, and then she broke into harsh, unmeaning laughter. She was to sing at the Albert Hall that night.

The manager regretted that Mme. Lucille had been taken ill. He was extremely sorry and he was angry, too, for Mme. Lucille's name on the bills had more than filled the house, and now her place was to be taken by a little pale faced girl, who looked hopelessly plain and unattractive.

Underwood! The very name was commonplace. The audience sighed impatiently and leaned wearily back against their cushioned seats. They looked more weary than ever when Nellie stepped upon the stage. She was clothed in white—a plain, old fashioned gown, years old, and with out a single flower, and they uttered a faint murmur.

The accompanist sat down and rattled off the opening bars of a famous old song. It was the cry of a woman for a lover she would never see again, and it was so old that people thought it was worn out.

The accompanist played on, the notes became lower and finally ceased, and then he waited.

Apparently Nellie had not heard. The music had fallen from her hands, and she was staring out with a white, set face at the crowded hall before her.

"Stage fright, poor thing," people murmured.

Some of them stared at her coldly. Some of them put up their opera glasses to look at her, but they could not see what she saw—a man lying tossing, perhaps dying, on a bed. They could not feel what she felt, that terrible aching at her heart, and that choking at her throat.

Suddenly the mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw, with a start, the waiting audience before her and the glances leveled to her face, and she turned to the accompanist. He understood her glance and commenced again.

Then she raised her eyes and stared straight toward the gallery. When she opened her lips, her voice rang out clear and full across the crowded hall. It never faltered. The notes fell from her lips liquid, wonderful, and the audience suddenly became still. They ceased to stare at her. Opera glasses fell—it was strange that they had been come down—and in that great hall there was scarcely a sound to be heard.

The song went on. What was there in that old fashioned air to hold them spell bound? A girl's fresh voice calling to her absent lover. They had never heard it sung like that before.

The eyes of beautiful women became moist. Strong men leaned forward to hide their faces. They scarcely realized it when the music stopped; then they looked up, to see her disappearing from the stage, and for a brief moment there was a dead silence.

Then the storm began. Artificial women fought their artificiality. Wounded men woke to life again and shouted wildly at the empty platform.

Nellie heard it faintly at the back, but her only thought was to get away to Ralph, and while she was speeding homeward in a cab a man was making profuse apologies to the audience. He was sorry Mrs. Underwood could not sing again that night, but he hoped and believed they would hear her again very soon.

When Nellie got home, the room seemed to her very dark. She saw distinctly two figures which came toward her as she entered, and then she heard a faint voice—Ralph's voice—speaking to her from the bed.

She heard neither the doctor's admonitions nor the nurse's entreaties. She knelt at her husband's side and sobbed her heart out on his pillow.

It was a long time before Ralph thoroughly recovered, but when he did there was no longer any fear of starvation staring them in the face.

Nellie's voice had driven the wolf from the door.—London Answers.

ARE CATHOLICS PRIEST-RIDDEN?

The Independent Protestant paper, has this to say upon an old subject: "From the elaborate statistics of the diverse Christian denominations, published, we gather the result that the adjective, 'priest ridden,' attaches not to Catholics but in its fullest sense to Protestant denominations. These very statistics show that the Catholic priests have the largest parishes, and the Baptist the smallest; that the Methodist

have four times as many churches and three times as many ministers, the Baptists nearly five times as many ministers as there are Catholic priests in the country, although they have little more than one half of the communicants. The result is that there are only ninety Baptists on an average to one of their churches; one hundred and ten Methodists to each of their congregations, whilst the average number of Catholics to one church is not less than seven hundred and sixty seven."

THE HIDDEN LIFE

Its Lessons and the Obstacles to Its Attainment.

When we contrast the life of our Lord at Nazareth with the life that we should naturally have expected Him to live (says Father Clarke, S. J., in "The Life and Ministry of Jesus") it seems as if He were throwing away opportunities of good. If He had preached in the chief cities of the world, would not His Divine eloquence have converted tens of thousands? Why then did He remain living a life of inaction at Nazareth? It seems strange to us, but we must recognize that God's ways are not like ours.

We often wonder why it is that God allows those who have great abilities or powers of doing good to remain hidden and out of sight. Sometimes He deprives them of the health and strength necessary for active work; sometimes He short their career just when they are beginning to make their influence felt; sometimes He leaves them where their life seems absolutely thrown away. We are inclined to regret it, and perhaps to think that we would have ordered it otherwise. But in view of the Hidden Life of Nazareth, all such regrets must of necessity disappear.

Would greater glory have been given to God if the Son of God had exercised His Divine power and converted all mankind while on earth, as He might easily have done? No, for that which pleases God best is that we should remain where He has placed us, even though our lives are apparently useless.

Never was a life so apparently useless as the life of Jesus at Nazareth. Yet every moment of it brought a glory to God compared with which the glory He derives from the service of all the Saints and Angels is as nothing.

What was the lesson that the Hidden Life at Nazareth was designed to teach? It was simply this, that the highest and most perfect kind of life does not consist in one occupation more than another, not in severe penances, not in active zeal, not in works of self-denying charity, not in living remote from all in order to spend one's life in contemplation and prayer, but simply in doing the will of God from day to day.

This and naught else is the secret of all piety and prayer, but simply in doing the will of God, simply and solely because it is the will of God, from day to day.

Is this an easy lesson? No, it is the most difficult lesson in the whole world. He who has really learned it in its perfection is already a great saint. It means that self and self will is dead within him and that he can say with the apostle, "I live now not I, but Christ lives in me." How far from this am I, in whom self lives and is so strong!

Is this an important lesson? It is the most important lesson in the whole world as it is the most difficult. Without having learned it we can never attain to solid or lasting happiness. We are exposed to have our happiness destroyed by something that we think we have reason to regret, something that interferes with our self will or threatens to interfere with our comfort, or with what we fancy will tend to our warfare or happiness. If only we could learn the secret of doing the will of God simply because it is His will, our life would be a haven upon earth.

What is it that makes it so difficult for us to do the will of God from day to day? It is mainly because we are not fully convinced that all true happiness is to be found in God, and God alone. We go on trying to attain happiness by doing our own will, even when we are conscious that it is opposed to the will of God. Yet we know by experience that all attempts to be happy without God prove miserable failures in the end.

Another obstacle is our inordinate love of our own will. It is one of the

consequences of free will, in our fallen state that a certain satisfaction is found in the mere arbitrary exercise of it. It is only when we have learned the joy without bound or limit that it is to be found in doing the holy will of God, that we are willing to forego the indulgence of our own will in order to put the will of God in its place. Then God's will becomes ours, or rather our own will disappears, swallowed up in the infinite Will of God.

Yet there is another obstacle consisting in the pain and suffering which are, from time to time, sure to accompany a faithful performance of the will of God. He permits this for the greater glory of His elect. Now pain and suffering are naturally very distasteful to us. We shrink from them instinctively. We require a very strong motive to enable us to face them. Nothing can counteract them save a strong fear and love of God.

This then must be my prayer: "Pierce through my flesh with Thy fear, O Lord, that I may love Thee ever more and more."

HOME EDUCATION.

The Church of God, in her exhortation to persons on their marriage, says: "If God bless you with children, let it be your first, your immediate care, after they are born, to make an offering of them to Him; and, as soon as possible, let them be strengthened from their original sin and enrolled among the number of His adopted children by the sacrament of baptism; and afterwards, in their earliest infancy, as soon as they can speak, begin to teach them the principles of Christian faith and the duties of a Christian life; * * * train them in the fear and love of God; * * * remember that if any of them perish through your neglect of giving them a proper education He will require their souls at your hands."

That is a clear statement of the obligations of parents: when a child is born make an offering of it to God; as soon as possible have it baptized; as soon as it can speak begin to teach it—teach it the first principles of the faith, and its duties of prayer to God and obedience to you. Not only teach, but also train it to fear and love God. These are the duties of parents, and if they fail in them, and the child be lost in consequence, God will require its soul at their hands.—American Herald.

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