

RATING OF MISS BOND

The current belief in Belford's innermost circle that Miss Bond was a good woman was shared by Miss Bond herself. Not that she ever said she was good; on the contrary, she called herself a great sinner, and would expatiate at length to a patient listener on her faults, which somehow, in her narration of them, were made to appear as virtues in disguise.

When Miss Bond heard how her character was aspersed, she did not fly into a passion. All she did was to sigh and say that she knew her faults and that stinginess and temper were not among them. If anything, she was too meek and patient; and, though not a spendthrift, her heart was open to give.

One servant had remained with her ten years, and great renown she gave her mistress. The women of her set said it was perfectly lovely in dear Miss Bond to put up with Margaret Callaghan. Margaret was so stupid. She never did seem to learn, and the mistakes she made were enough to try the patience of a saint. "But, then, Elizabeth Bond is a saint, if ever there was one."

On a certain Wednesday, the eve of the Ascension, Miss Bond was instructing Margaret in duties appertaining to luncheon she was about to give, and that was to eclipse anything of the kind ever before given in Belford.

"You will bring the dishes to the door only. Luella will hand them round. Under no circumstances are you to enter the room," she said, peremptorily.

"And what, ma'am, if you're pleased to tell me, is a green and white luncheon?" asked Margaret, with visions of dear knows what in her mind. For she was very patriotic; and, having nothing else to give, gave her quota of prayers to the "cherished country."

Miss Bond's countenance assumed a look that forbade trouble. "I wish you would pay attention, Margaret," she reproved. "You will bring nothing to Luella but what cook gives you to bring."

"And if she be short of a knife or a fork—it might be a spoon—"

"Pshaw! I mean the eatables. You are to bring them in the order cook hands them to you. Do you understand?"

"Indeed I do, ma'am," said Margaret, and shook her head wisely. "And I remember now," she continued, "the knives and forks are in the cupboard by the sideboard—"

"And there's another thing," hurried on Miss Bond, interrupting. "Luella's hands will be full of things you ought to attend to." (Margaret's countenance fell.) "You will have to answer the bell. I give you credit for neatness; be your neatest on Monday."

Margaret was all smiles now. With a courtesy she had learned at home, she exclaimed, with assured confidence:

"Trust me for that, ma'am!" Miss Bond nodded her head and added, "That's all for the present," dismissed Margaret, and turned her attention to the writing table before her, which was littered with note paper of various sizes and divers tints.

"I should have a secretary. All these notes to write, my correspondence; and that upstairs Synthe woman, whom I'll have to invite, has one!" she grumbled to herself as she rummaged through a heap of envelopes, pausing to extract one with a jerk.

"Father Cudahy's everlasting collections for the church!" she said, half aloud, and glanced over the printed matter on the envelope's face. "We had one at Easter; does he think people have nothing else to do with their money but hand it over to him—"

A sharp knock at the door, its flying open suddenly and the entrance of Luella with cap strings streaming, brought Miss Bond's soliloquy to an abrupt conclusion.

"I do wish, Luella, you would enter a room without creating a draught!" she ejaculated, testily.

Not noticing the reproof otherwise than by a sharpening of her chin, the girl handed her a letter.

"It's the dressmaker's bill; she left it herself. This makes the third time she's left it," said Luella, in a voice without sentiment and nasally phonographic.

Miss Bond's face grew very red. "Sure but very slow," was what the people said of her payments.

"Do you know that you are very impatient!" she said slowly. "Luella's chin was lifted higher, and there was a warning in the meek tones of her reply.

"Indeed, miss, I never knew it was an impertinence to speak the truth." Miss Bond would have liked to order the girl out of the house, but the luncheon in view she contented herself with ordering her out of the room.

Her voice slightly elevated, Luella retorted that she would gladly give her place if Miss Bond would kindly pay her her wages.

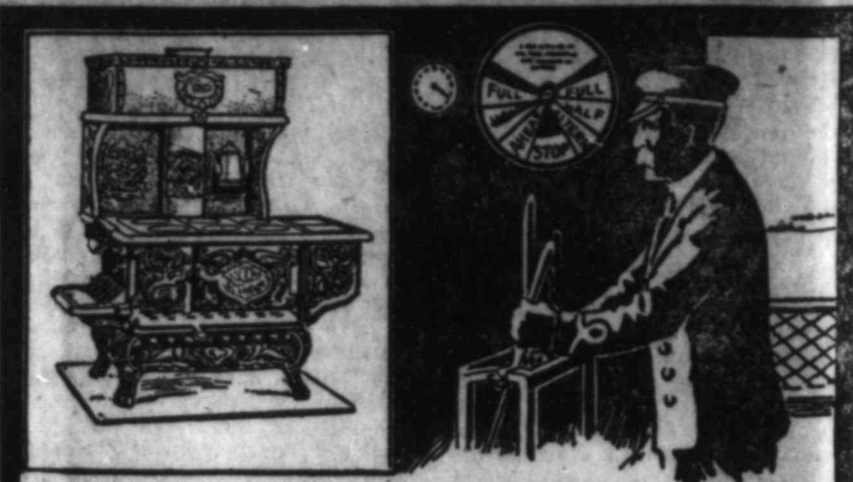
"Why, Luella!" grasped the mistress.

"Why, Luella!" mimicked the girl. "What you'd like to do is to—box my ears, and I don't blame you for that, for you're thinking about your luncheon. But won't Margaret do for the green part of it? For, dear—"

she's green, stopping on herself all these years and for thanks nothing but nag, nag from morning till night, and every pinch of salt you reckoned up and counted against you. And it is mean keeping a lady waiting for a bill as you've kept Miss Haydon, and she is member of your church—which I haven't a word to say again, for that poor, patient Margaret of yours has made me most to love it. But I'd hate it if all Catholics were like you. And I'm sorry to have to speak so, but the truth's the truth. And I can't stand it longer—I cannot!"

Luella fairly screamed the last words and then burst into a flood of tears.

Miss Bond sat upright in her chair, too stunned to speak. Gross—rude—she had received from servants, but never had she been so berated to her face. A close and nagging woman she was from habit and not



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from nature, but she was not a foolish woman. By no means did she believe the charges brought against her to be true to their full extent; but she did acknowledge to herself that she had been somewhat at fault.

"Margaret"—she spoke so gently that the girl flushed with pleasure—"I wish you would take this note to Miss Haydon with my compliments. It is only a step, you know, and when you return come directly to me. I have something to say to you."

"Luella has been instructing me about the luncheon—" "Bother the luncheon!" interrupted Miss Bond; and she continued, in a milder tone: "What I have to say is of more importance than green and white luncheons."

Again alone, her mind reverted to those words of Luella that, more than ought else the girl uttered, had brought her roughly to a true knowledge of herself. Poor, despised Margaret had made Luella love the Church, and "if all Catholics were like you I'd hate it!" In a way she had considered herself a missionary of the faith. For this reason, she had schooled herself to believe, she had cultivated the St. Jude's set—St. Jude's being the fashionable Protestant Church of Belford. If she did not make converts—and she did not—at least she removed prejudices, she had taught herself to believe. She had taken credit to herself that Luella went to Mass instead of to the particular meeting house she had been wont to frequent. "The girl must think to herself that if I, who am, socially, head and shoulders above any one else in Belford, am a Catholic, it must be the true religion." She thought of this now with a bitter laugh at herself, and told herself that she was a snob.

The girl, too, had spoken of confession as one of her mistress's privileges. How often did she enter the tribunal of mercy? It could not be said she was a Catholic who altogether neglected the practice of her religion. About three times a year she knelt at the altar rail, and, though a slight indisposition had been made to stand in the way, she was quite regular in her attendance at Mass. Neither could it be said she was indifferent to the faith. She was simply a woman who had permitted weeds to flourish in her soul; a woman who had no true knowledge of herself, till rudely awakened to a consciousness of her defects by the insolence of a servant. And it was a proof of the innate goodness of her heart that, far from feeling angry with Luella, she approved of her, and felt she could beg the girl's pardon for the scandal she had given—a thing she never did, unless a changed demeanor be a way of begging pardon. It must not be supposed that this new manner she cultivated was without lapses, for lapses there were, but they became more and more infrequent as time went on.

Her humbling meditations were interrupted by the return of Margaret, breathless from rapid walking.

"Miss Haydon was very pleased, ma'am, and she bade me give you this," she said, handing her mistress a sealed envelope.

Miss Bond made a motion with her hand for Margaret to remain, and proceeded to read the letter the dressmaker had enclosed with the receipted bill. The letter in a manner was a postscript to Luella's rating.

It thanked her for the payment of the bill, and apologized with evident sincerity and simplicity for having misjudged Miss Bond. "I thought you niggardly and hard-hearted, Elizabeth—I may call you so again—and I have sinned by my rash judgment."

Miss Bond's mind flashed back to her convent school days, when she and Julia Haydon had been bosom friends and classmates. Reverses of fortune came to the Haydons, and Julia was left with a little brother to care for as best she could. "She is better born than any of the Jude set, and she has been but my dressmaker to me all these years! God forgive me!" she said. For the second time that day she sighed; for the first for her sins.

"Margaret, sit down," she said. "Ma'am?" stammered Margaret. "Sit down. I wish to talk to you."

Margaret looked about for the least comfortable chair in her proximity, and having found it, seated herself on its edge and smoothed her long white apron on her knees with nervous hands.

"Margaret," said Miss Bond, thoughtfully, "I heard to-day that you have an old and sick mother."

"I have, ma'am," said Margaret, in alarm; "but indeed she'll never trouble you, ma'am—not in the least."

Miss Bond started in her chair. These reiterated confirmations of the character Luella gave her had somewhat the same effect on her consciousness as that which is produced by a blow on the nape of the neck, and for a moment or two she stared before her in a dazed manner ere she said: "No, no, ma'am; indeed and indeed I do not!" interrupted Margaret.

"But fault-finding, very hard to please, Margaret," she persisted.



"And who wouldn't be with a green-horn like myself? And I doubt that's what I'll always be. And, then, the weather is sometimes trying to a lady like you."

"But your mother—did you never speak to me of her?" "But sure, ma'am, why would I be troubling you? And I'd a mind for my place," faltered Margaret.

"You thought that I would send you away if I learned your mother depended on you?" Her voice sounded hard and unsympathetic, not that she was either at the present juncture. She was only striving to repress her feelings.

"You see, ma'am, it was this way," hesitated Margaret. "I wanted to keep my place, for my mother needs the wages, and I had a dread of being troublesome like."

"And," Miss Bond went on, "you have worried about your mother, and that has made you at times—not careless, but not in sympathy with your duties." She hesitated for a word to express herself, and now that it was uttered, she wondered if Margaret would understand.

Margaret understood, and her tears fell fast.

"Well, it's true, ma'am," she replied, and believing the dread expulsion close to come, she added, with heartfelt resignation, "The Lord be praised!"

"You poor, dear soul!" cried Miss Bond, no longer able to control her feelings. "But I deserve that you should think me cruel."

Poor Margaret stared in unfeigned amazement.

"I never said that, ma'am, nor thought it either. Indeed and indeed I did not!" she exclaimed.

That afternoon Miss Bond went to confession. Intentionally she had never made a bad one—perhaps in reality she never had. But to-day she made the best of all possible good confessions: the kind which the motive for contrition is love—for God, our Father, and for His children, all of whom without exception are our brothers and our sisters.

When Father Cudahy—"one of those priests we read about in good books" said the Belford people—opened the envelopes containing the donations for the much-needed decorations of his church, one that was anonymous contained a sum sufficient of itself to pay for the desired altar. It was not long before he found out that Miss Bond was the donor.

Margaret's mother came to Belford to live, and the invigorating air, as well as the proper food provided by one who never ceased to be her friend, gave her new life, and, no longer entirely dependent on Margaret, she helps by plain sewing to support herself.

The green and white luncheon was a great success. Luella outdid herself, and was well seconded by the heart-relieved Margaret. An honored guest was a Miss Julia Haydon, at which the St. Jude set would have rebelled had they dared. Miss Bond was too great a power for them to attempt to upset her leadership.

When, years after, a new church was erected in Belford for the increasing Catholic population, Father Michael Haydon called it St. Elizabeth's, in remembrance, perhaps, of a woman whose endowment to the seminary made it possible for him to extend his course of studies for the priesthood.

It was in the season of the Epiphany that Miss Bond, passing down a corridor, heard Margaret say to Luella:

"It would be a great honor for you to have the mistress for your godmother."

"I know it would. But I'd rather have you, Margaret, for it was you led me first to think of it," said Luella.

Miss Bond acquiesced with humility to the judgment of her maid, but when Luella came to be confirmed, she provided the frock and veil, and then she was her godmother.—Ave Maria.

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