

SISTER VIRGINIA.

A Heroine of the Battlefield and a Martyr to Duty.

The self-sacrificing spirit of the Sister of Charity is as admirable as that of the Catholic priest.

It was in the beginning of July, 1866, when the war between Prussia and Italy against Austria was at its height; the military hospitals of Brescia were encumbered with sick and wounded soldiers, among whom was a young soldier likely to die of his wounds.

Carried to the hospital, he bore with out a groan the amputation of an arm and the sewing of his gaping wounds.

As already stated, he was given in charge to Sister Virginia, who was very popular among the soldiers.

"We shall now see," they said among themselves, "if Sister Virginia will be able to save him from the grasp of death; if she does it will be a real miracle."

The misfortunes and sufferings of the unfortunate young man excited the liveliest sympathies in Sister Virginia's heart for him, and she resolved to restore him to life by the most assiduous care and fervent prayers.

She took her place at his bedside and left him neither day nor night. She dressed his wounds with the greatest care, prepared his medicines, while perched words of hope in his ears, while at the same time she asked God to cure him.

"Mother, help me!" exclaimed the poor fellow in the midst of his excruciating pains, and he turned toward her looks of hope as if he had the Blessed Virgin near him.

"Here I am, my son," answered Sister Virginia, lavishing on him all the care and consolation of a mother to a suffering son.

In a few days the poor soldier became delirious with fever. In his ravings he was restless, trying to jump out of bed, to re-open his wounds; but Sister Virginia was always on the look-out to watch him, soothing him with kind words, gently reproving him, giving him one drop at a time of some preparation to calm him, and after doing all she could, she wept and prayed.

Who could tell all that patient woman suffered during the three days and nights that this paroxysm lasted! At last the crisis ended with a favorable turn; the pulsation of the patient became less rapid, his delirium ceased, the wounds assumed a healthy look and hope once more brightened this bed of suffering.

Sister Virginia watched this poor young man's restoration to health with the secret satisfaction of having done her duty. After the young soldier had recovered consciousness he was able to recognize his patient nurse, and noticing her wasted and pale he asked himself when it had not been her for the last time—if it had not been for months and even a whole year.

"Sister Virginia," he said, "when was it that I saw you last? Where have you been all this time? Have you been sick? What is the matter with you?"

"Oh it is only three days since you saw me, or rather ceased to recognize me. I have always been here waiting on you. I have not been away an instant."

"Only three days! But where was I all this time? Ah, Sister Virginia, I understand now. Fever made me unconscious; but since I see you and understand what you have done, I am not pleased."

"And why so? Have you been wanting anything? Why do you find fault with me?"

"You have done too much for me; you have been growing thinner every day, and this is painful to me, I assure you."

"I have only done my duty—neither more nor less."

"Why do you not take some rest now?"

"And why did you not run away when the Austrian Uhans rushed on you with their swords flashing in the air?"

"I am a soldier—a man. I have sworn to die for my colors and my King."

"Well, I also have sworn to hold my ground to the last. I have taken an oath before a King Who is greater than all the kings of earth."

"But if you work above your strength you will not be able to hold up; you will become sick and perhaps die."

"And what of it? If you soldiers do not fear to die for your flag and for mortal king, why should I fear to fall for my God?"

No answer came from the soldier; but he drew the sheet over his face as if he wanted to sleep, while in reality he was moved to shed tears. He felt that this simple woman was as brave as the soldiers who had fallen on the battlefield; for, sustained by a faith which came from above and was the

pledge of a better life, she dared to die slowly, unnoticed by the world, far from the pomp and glory which attend death in war.

One day there was a great uproar in the wards of the hospital; Prince Humbert himself had come to visit his wounded companions in arms. He wished to know the history, the acts of bravery, the merits and sufferings of each one of them.

Coming to the bed of our soldier, as soon as he had learned what he had done and how much he had suffered to protect his august person, the prince, with a feeling of affectionate gratitude, pressed his hand and fastened to his breast a medal for military prowess.

Deeply moved, the soldier thanked the prince, then rising with a strong effort: "Royal Highness," he said, "permit me, I pray you, to part with this honor in favor of a person who has deserved it better than I—to this angel, who has nursed me for three weeks with so much heroism, suffering fearfully herself to restore me to life. It is she who has the true courage of patience and charity."

In speaking thus he was trying to put the medal in the Sister's hand, who, with eyes cast to the floor, modestly said: "I have only done my duty."

The prince, who had been deeply moved by the scene, realizing from the weak voice and pale face of Sister Virginia what she had borne for the last three weeks, resolved at once to give her also a medal. The Sister thanked the prince, but when he was gone, looking to the large crucifix hanging on the wall, she attached to the feet the silver medal she had just received, saying: "Here is the true courage: all bravery comes from Him."

A month later the good soldier left his bed; his wounds were healing up, and leaning on a crutch he was able to walk about the wards and corridors.

"It is a real miracle," said those who had seen him the first day he was brought to the hospital.

"A real miracle of charity," he would add, and he looked about hoping to see the angel who had brought him to life.

But Sister Virginia had disappeared for several days and she was not returning.

"She will take a rest," thought her young friend, while trying to keep back a thought which made him anxious. "She will rest the poor, dear Sister! It was time! She has well deserved it!"

And indeed Sister Virginia was resting—resting forever! One afternoon there came from the yard to the hospital a slow and plaintive singing. All the convalescents and the patients able to get up looked through all the available openings. They saw and understood. No one moved or said a word; all uncovered themselves, silent and affected. The singing continued, tender and sad, as if angels themselves were shedding tears. It was a procession of virgins following a coffin covered with a white cloth, on which had been placed a single wreath of white roses.

Sister Virginia was on her way to eternal rest. She also had fallen at the breach, consumed by the fire of patience and charity, a victim to duty—faithful to her oath, she was going to receive the eternal crown of heroes.

All sent her a farewell from their inmost heart, and the soldier whom she had recalled to life lay down on his bed and cried; he cried like a little child over his dead mother.

There is not a nobler and truer courage than that of a virgin who gives her life to save that of brave soldiers, and the tears of heroes is her greatest honor that can be bestowed on her.

THE MASTER'S RULE.

Once upon a time there was a master who gave unto one of his subjects a powerful weapon. "Remember," the master said, "the weapon I give thee is two-edged and hath a poisoned tip; but use it for my honor and no harm shalt thou do with it."

And the subject tarred forth with his wonderful weapon, such as no man in all the realm over which he travelled could fashion; for it was not of gold nor of silver nor of tempered steel.

Soon a messenger came to the king and said: "O master, thy subject hath raised the weapon thou didst give him against his fellowman! Bid me take the weapon from him." But the master, sorrowing, said: "Do thou counsel and warn him rather, that he may amend his ways."

Then appeared other servants of the king, saying: "O master, thy subject hath raised the weapon thou didst give him against thy sacred teaching, and he striveth to rend the garment of truth! Bid us take the weapon from him." But the master, grieving, replied: "Counsel and warn him rather, that he may amend his ways."

Then came still other messengers, their pinnacles quivering from the swift flight, and they cried aloud to the king: "O master, thy subject hath raised the weapon thou didst give him against the innocence of a child's soul, and he speaketh evil into pure ears! And the master arose in his wrath and cried out: "Seize him, and binding him hand and foot, cast him into exterior darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."—Ave Maria.

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TO DAY.

To-day is compounded of a thousand yesterdays, the one precious drop distilled from the heart-drobs of those who have gone before, a jewel shining in its appointed place, held there by powers invisible, as a feather is suspended motionless in the center of the earth.

The pressure of past centuries impels us forward to take our part in the plan of eternal change; we are pushed onward like wind-driven mist, slowly or quickly, according to the momentum of that implacable Before, but always surely—forever so.

On a circle of a hundred years, with its accumulated sorrows and joys; its failures and triumphs; its despairs and exaltations, pass over a people and leave no impress for good or evil? Is not to have been, a reason to always be? Are not the past and the present one?

The laws of nature are wise and irrevocable—nothing is ventured—all is calculated and that with a nicety which convinces even while it surprises and confounds. We can not separate the cause from the effect, the effect from the cause; if this were possible the world would sink once more into chaos and man a troubled soul be adrift seeking for habitation.

That we suffer for the sins of our fathers as we profit by their virtues is a long acknowledged truth; a truth that we know, we feel, we speak, and yet, towards that we are, we shrink from living according to its light. We will not care for the grain, that others may reap the harvest; we devour the Now, as an epicure a luscious peach, then crushing the kernel beneath our heel, we scatter the wounded fragments to future generations.

How vain, how egotistical is man in his hopes and aims! Even in those elevations of thought that lift him near the Sublime: in those moments of ecstasy when the incomprehensible is revealed in a flash of perfect knowledge, when the stillness of the starry heavens, the hissing of the hurricane, the mingled murmers of the morn resolve themselves into one grand harmony, that sweeps through the innermost chambers of his soul, thrilling his whole being with dignity and purpose.

In that moment, the tabernacle behind the veil, man is still bound to his coarser self by infinite chains of materialism, for into whatever ideal realms his spirit may soar, the duties of To-day, the work of the Present, are cast aside as unfit for these higher transports.

Oh, the all importance, the significance, the majesty of the Present? Of the moment that is ours, that is neither gone nor coming, but is with us now, close—close by our side. Yet, like Abraham we would sacrifice our best beloved child to appease an angry God, and giving ear to his promises we watch the smoke of the holocaust murmuring, "it is well."

Blind that we are, we immolate our one eye-lame, and our trust is betrayed: the Future is no omnipotent deity, but an image put together by our own hands; an idol of clay bedecked and painted by our own foolish fancies. We live in a world of dreams pompous and meaningless; we worship the so-called infinite and blaspheme the finite; we chant hymns to immortality and give no word of cheer to our weary neighbor; we deny food to the hungry and spread a feast for the birds of the air. We are like sleeping merchants who dream of wealth while their cargo is rotting in the port; we are like mechanics with rusty tools who boast of their diligence.

Let us awake to a knowledge of ourselves. And if we are healthy, whole-souled, earnest-meaning men, let us hew the granite of to-day into our best endeavor, the work we do now is the work that is wanted: the word we speak now is the word that is heard, the life we live now is the first germ of immortality.

Yesterday may be compared to the metal beaten into shape. To-morrow, the ore still buried in the bowels of the earth: To-day, the molten liquid ready to be poured into the moulds.

Why has not To-day a thousand tongues that each might cry "behold me!" Why has not To-day a thousand hands to pluck us from our bed of sloth? Phantoms of lost opportunities, arise from your ashes, and confront us with your sunken cheeks and despairing eyes. Graves empty your dead and bid them speak of that Beyond where there is naught to do. To-day press high unto us: wrap us in your glowing mantle: fold us in your strong young arms; breathe your vigorous life into our veins. Show us your mighty frame lying idle, your powerful hands waiting for work, let your voice ring loud and clear till for very shame we do your bidding.

What claim have we upon the sepulchres of the Part or the cradles of the Future, that we hold them preciously as our best gifts, and cast our own heritages to the dogs.

We must learn to live now before we reach those higher realms where we may say, "we shall forever!" we must learn to speak the timely word before we may join in the symphony that echoes throughout all time, we must learn to crush the mighty "I," before the mighty "He" rises triumphant.

To work then ere it be too late. No loitering by the wayside, no looking toward the mist covered heights: he that walks with averted or upturned eyes will stumble. But with steadfast, earnest bearing, let us grasp our implements of toil and unear the rocks that lie round about us.

Behold the task of To-day—the Supreme duty of the great Now. Ours

forever—or forever lost.—Catholic Youth.

"THE QUALITY" IN IRELAND.

"Protestantism in Ireland," says George Bernard Shaw, the eminent critic, "is not a religion; it is a side in political faction, a class prejudice, a conviction that Roman Catholics are socially inferior persons, who will go to hell when they die, and leave Heaven to the exclusive possession of ladies and gentlemen. Imagine being taught that their is one God—a Protestant and a perfect gentleman—keeping Heaven select for the gentry; and an idiotic impostor called the Pope smoothing the hallowed way for the mass of the people, only admissible into the kitchens of most of the aforesaid gentry as 'thorough-servants' (general servants) at 45 a year! Imagine the pretensions of the English lower middle class! If I had not suffered from these things in my childhood, perhaps, I could keep my temper about them. To an outsider there is nothing but comedy in the spectacle of a Catholic country, led by a miniature plutocracy of stock-brokers, doctors and land agents, and favored by that section of the landed gentry who are too heavily mortgaged to escape to London, playing at being a Court and an aristocracy with the assistance of the unfortunate exile who has been persuaded to accept the post of Lord Lieutenant. To this pretence, involving a prodigious and continual lying as to incomes and the social standing of relatives, are sacrificed citizenship, self-respect, freedom of thought, sincerity of character, and all the realities of life, its votaries gaining in return the hostile estrangement of the great mass of their fellow-countrymen, and in their own class the supercilious snubs of those who have outdone them in pretension and the jealous envy of those whom they have outdone."

What follows is as hard a hit, and probably as well deserved, as ever says New Ireland, as G. B. S. has ever attempted at the English. "Only the other day it was proposed to me that I should help to uplift my downtrodden country by assembling with other Irishmen to romance about 1798. I do not take the slightest interest in 1798. Until Irishmen apply themselves seriously to what the condition of Ireland is to be in 1908 (probably they will consider the matter, at a dinner in some other country in 2008) they will get very little patriotism out of G. B. S." Our countryman is an ardent Socialist, who is more concerned with the future than the past, as the above shows.—Boston Pilot.

MARY, QUEEN OF MAY.

From the Young Catholic we call this pretty May-flower for Mary: May is pre-eminently the month of flowers. In pagan days it was called Flora. Life and growth, youth and gaiety, and whatever there is of loveliness or that hath in itself a budding promise, are all associated with May, and at that season are regarded with an especial tenderness and affection. It is the season of growing grass and unfolding leaf and budding flowers, of renewed vitality and vigor throughout the domain of nature; the season when earth and air team with throbbing life, and the season when the icy hand of winter hath relaxed its grip and nature thrills beneath the genial touch of spring, and man's pulse beats in harmony with the newness of life that is abroad. That season of full blossom and rich promise is consecrated to Mary, whom the nations called blessed.

Nature is decked in her newest and her brightest, and whatever is best in nature we lay at her feet with reverent hand and loving heart; we decorate her shrine, and proclaim her Queen of May, blessed among women and fairest of God's creatures.

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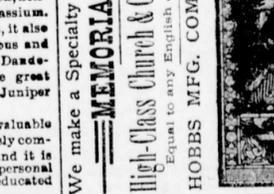
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