

"All right," answered Steve. "Suit yourself. You can't all have torches, that's sure."

"Make him an acolyte, and be done with it?" somebody suggested provokingly.

"Or give him the censer anyhow!" said another. "He has been on the altar just one year Christmas to a day."

"Here's the censer," piped up a gentle voice. And the boy whose duty it was that Sunday to empty it, came suddenly into the noisy throng.

He was very short, very small, very boyish for his years. He was really fifteen and he looked scarcely twelve. He was singularly placid, easy, gentle in his appearance and he made his way straight through the crowd and up to the moderator, holding out the censer to him with a swing.

"Who wants it?"

"Lawrence O'Keefe," a dozen voices answered.

The boy with the censer turned and saw the dark face glowering in the corner, the teeth hard set, the eyes full of a dull fire.

"Lawrence O'Keefe?" he repeated slowly. "Why, I don't think he ever swung a censer in his life."

"No more he didn't!" cried Pat Lynch. "Nor did any thing else worth doing, since he came on."

"That's so!" said Louis Capelle. "That's a fact. He never takes his week-day Mass, or only once in an age, and you know it, Martin."

"No matter," explained Lawrence fiercely. "I'll, cary a torch at least, or I'll leave the altar. I'll not stand like a stick with the little kids, before everybody, at High Mass Christmas Day."

Martin was silent a minute, then said gently, "It's rather noisy here, isn't it, Steve? I wonder what St. John would say to it?"

"You are right, Martin. Only I thought it might be best to hear them out and have it over."

"I say, boys, be quiet, and get sense if you can! It will all come square, O'Keefe, if you behave yourself."