

TOM O'KEEFE, THE UNBELIEVER.

It was when the child died that Tom O'Keefe uttered his first blasphemy against God. "Don't tell me that it is the will of God," he said to the pale-faced curate who tried to comfort him. "This more like the will of the devil, if devil there is or God either. 'Tis as a devil's act to rob me first of Mary and then of the child. What do you know of the loss of a woman and a child, that never had the like nor ever will have?" "God help you, Tom," said the curate lifting his hands in horror, "and forgive you!" The trouble has driven you mad, surely?" For it was the first time in that parish since St. Patrick turned men from idols that any had said there was no God, or had stiffened their neck against the yoke, however heavy He would lay upon it. The mood did not pass with the first despair, as the curate had hoped. The third day after the death, Tom carried the little coffin in his arms to lay it in the new grave that was only opened a year before for his young wife. A little coffin it was, yet the sweat was on the man's white face as though he were carrying the round world. A group of the neighbors waited by grave. Tom's terrible way of taking the child's death had indeed caused something of a scandal, but, talking it over the most of the people were agreed that God would not take seriously, or perhaps did not pretend to hear the man's denial of Him. "Tis like a sick child," said Judy Malone, who had lost her seven children in the great famine. "You'd never know them, they do be that cranky an impident when they're down, but who'd be remember 'em 't agen them, the cratures, wance they're about again?" They drew closer to Tom as he laid the little coffin in the grave and hit it with the clay. Then, as he put on his coat and turned to go, an old man approached him. "God help you, Tom," he said, "to be a man and bear it." Tom turned a ghastly face upon him. "There's no God," he said, "I think there's a devil, but I'm sure there's no God." "After that people held away from him, but he didn't seem to know or care. And presently, when it was hay-making time, the roaming fit came upon him, and he left his spade struck in the ground one day and was off with the harvesters to England. "He'll come back in his right mind," said the curate, who had a tenderness for poor Tom even now. Maybe he might have, too, only that when the harvest was over, instead of going back with the other men to Ballygrun, he tramped to Liverpool, and got taken on as a dock laborer. He was still sick of his trouble when one day he stopped in the street to hear a man who was preaching on the pavement that there was no God, and that the image men had formed of Him was a tyranny that blasted the joy of the world. The things the preacher said went to Tom's head like strong drink. It wasn't in him, though he didn't know it, really to disbelieve in God. He said, "There is no God," but all the time he hated that Power which had robbed him of his wife and child, and had a blitid desire to insult, outrage, to destroy if he might the image he had formed to himself of a devil-god. He remained a year in Liverpool, and was known at every hall and below-every platform where men said like himself that there was no God, hating God all the time. For Tom, unbelief meant no easy way for the sins of the flesh, as it might have meant with another. He was an abstemious man by nature, and the coarse vices only sickened him when he saw them in others. But he grew paler every day, and his eyes greater in his head. He worked like a man consumed by an inward fire, and so he was with the fire of his hatred for God and his futile thirst for revenge upon Him. Then one day he went home. The grave in St. Declan's churchyard at Ballygrun was calling him, and he had a sudden loathing of the fine and murky streets he knew. It seemed to him that there was one little plot of earth his own forever, and he was homesick to look upon it. It was not his wretched bit of mountain and bog; it was the sacred grave which tugged at his heart strings. He opened his cabin door one wet spring afternoon and went in, as if he had only been gone one hour. The place smelt moldy and the rain dripped through a hole in the thatch; the white ashes of last year's fire lay upon the hearth. He looked out of the window and saw the spade sticking in the earth where he had left it. "Tis time to be turnin' the ground again for the seedin'," he said to himself, and taking off his coat he went out and turned a portion of the sod. He didn't look for living long, people thought, but there was nothing the matter with him really save that consuming hatred. The pursuit of it took him to the public-house, the most likely ground in which to sow his tares in other men's minds. When men had drunk taken they didn't mind a little wild talk, and what they got accustomed to when warm with the drink soon didn't shock them when they were sober. There were one or two returned Irish-Americans in the village, who had come back because they were no more use to the country they went to than the country they had left. Tom was not likely to shock them. They listened with a cynical grin to his wild speeches, and applauded him to further

violence. Not that Tom wanted them, he wanted believers, but these fellows served his turn, for they encouraged the more timid ones who did not like to seem untravelling men and not used to the ways of the world. The love of God was as real a thing as Tom's hatred, but, strive how he would that little centre of infection that was Tom's grew and extended its shadow in the place. The people, even those who were not to be turned, shuddered no longer when they heard it said there was no God. They had looked at first for His lightnings to fall, but He made no more sign than the old gods St. Patrick had overthrown. Some yet said that in His own time He would strike, but others, and they were mainly men, felt that Tom's defiance of Him was somehow a fine thing, justified, since He did not trouble to defend Himself. So, little by little, the number of those who came to listen to Tom was increased, and for some it was pleasant to hear there was no God, since there were so many desirable things His law had forbidden. The curate wasted himself in prayer against this blasting evil which had grown among his people. He was not the one to go down to the public-house or among the little parliaments in the forge to answer Tom and confute him. Perhaps if he had, the knots of men who were not afraid of God might have melted like snow before his meek face. Perhaps he might have worsted Tom in a wordy conflict, and carried his stray sheep back to God in a wave of admiration and wonder. But he did not attempt it. He was not the militant sort. He contented himself with calling God to take His own part and save His people, and his prayers went on day long and night long till he was like a ghost from watching and fasting and extremity of prayer. During this time Tom did not go much to the churchyard. Indeed once he had satisfied his hunger to look upon the plot that held his all, he went there no more. He knew that Mary would be unhappy if she could know the thing he was doing, and, woman-like, would not understand that it was because he loved her and the child so much. He mocked at heaven as a delusion, and yet, standing by the grave in Ballygrun churchyard, he felt ill at ease, as if somewhere she must know, and would turn him from his purpose. He did not take to drink, though he went so often to the public house. He was but a poor customer himself; but he brought others, and the publican, who was miserly, did not complain. Those hours of his propaganda were what kept Tom O'Keefe alive during the long days when he dug and planted the bit of land on the mountain side. He had in no way departed from the old industrious ways that were his while Mary was alive. He had mended his hatch and repaired his floor, and replenished his turf stack, and then set to work to reclaim another little bit of land from the mountain, and another, and another. It was fierce work, and entailed labor fitter for a beast than a man, but he liked it; it was of a piece with his war against that silent and impassive God who had taken his all. It was a year since Tom had come home, and still the numbers of his disciples grew. One night—the blackest night it was, though there were points of stars in the black, and now and again a meteor trailed its fiery length across heaven ere it leaped to earth—Tom was going home from the public house. He was in a very black part of the road, where trees overarching made a matted roof of boughs, and he could hear far below the sighing of the surf, when he saw a little way ahead in the road a light no bigger than a will-o'-the-wisp. It was coming toward him, and then it was at his side, and circling about his head, and he felt the air growing lighter and lighter. Presently the thing took shape, and he saw it was like a tree, yes, just like the burning bush of which the curate had told him in his sermon. He saw the leaves plain, all glittering, for they had a hard bright surface like holly, and the little tips of them were small flames, radiant and not burning. On one side of the tree there was a nebulous brightness, white and sharp, and at first Tom could not make out what it held. Then little by little he saw. And what he saw was his own little Patsy, whom he had laid in the coffin himself more than two years ago, and covered with the sods in the churchyard. The child was looking at him. He saw the soft innocent little features and the eyes with their deep irises, and the pretty hair curling in little rings at the neck. The little figure perched as prettily among the lit boughs as a robin in the holly. Tom went down on his knees in the middle of the road and stretched his hands to the radiant little figure. He would have seized it, if he could, and held it to his hungry heart but something invisible beat him back. It was as though he saw his bird in a cage; and his hungry desire to snatch him one instant to his breast had something wolfish in it. "Patsy," he panted, "is it you, Patsy?" "It is I, Dada," said the little voice that had been sweeter to him than ever the birds of heaven could be. "But your grave is in Ballygrun," said the man. "I buried you there myself." "Not my soul, Dada, only my body." "Where have you been since, Patsy?" And where is your mother that she doesn't come too?" "She is in heaven, praying for you; and I cannot go to her."

"What keeps you out of heaven Patsy?" said the man, and his hands worked at the thought of his invisible enemy. "Not God, Dada, but you." "Oh, my God!" said the man, returning unconsciously to the cry of the anguished. "How do I keep you out, Patsy? I who would stay in hell for ever to buy you an hour of heaven." "Look about you and see." Tom O'Keefe peered about him in the darkness. Then he saw beyond the circle of the light, fangs and claws and eyes of torment innumerable and the tree fell upon the road there was a sharp circle, and within that space was clear of demons. "They come nearer and nearer," said little Patsy. "Every minute they remind God that your cup is full. 'Tis only for my sake and my mother's that God has patience. Your angel went back to heaven long since. If I left you, you would be lost." "Don't stay with me, Patsy, agra," said the man, "if you would rather be in heaven." "Because of you," said the child, unheeding, "I have never crossed its door. I have never tasted its blessedness. God allows it. The other children are with God and Our Blessed Lady in heaven. I keep my watch still on earth." "An' it's Dada that's keepin' you, Patsy?" asked the father. "It is, then," said the child. "There are millions and millions of children in heaven this holy month, all stinging Our Lady's praises while the angels light the tapers." "Something of longing in the child's voice stabbed the man's heart. "Is it lonesome out of heaven, Patsy?" he asked. "It is lonesome. And I cannot sleep by night or day for watching you lest the fiends seize you. The other children have their beds of down where they rest when the sleep takes them." "How long have you been watching over me, Patsy?" "Since you laid my body in the churchyard and said: 'There is no God.'" "Oh, my God!" cried the man again, "two years and a half! It is a long time to keep you between earth and heaven, Patsy." "Listen now, Patsy," said the child. "A poor old battered soul like mine isn't worth it. Leave me to the torture and go to your mother in heaven." The child smiled a strange, wise smile for a little lad. "Am I to go, Dada?" "Yes, go, Patsy. But if you can, kiss me once before you go, it will keep the dew on my lips." The child leaned out of the tree and kissed him; and the heart-hunger of the man was assuaged as by a delicious draught. "Now go, Patsy," he panted. "I am ready for the torture." "Not till you save yourself, Dada, and set me free." "How can I do it, Patsy? I have sinned beyond forgiveness." "But you have loved much," said the wise child. "And God forgives much to love. Besides, He pardons when He is asked for pardon. Kneel down there in the road, make an act of contrition, and sign yourself with the sign." The man did as he was bid. "Now," said the child, "look about you." Tom O'Keefe peered into the darkness. It was thick as ever, and yet he could see the wings of the black angels like bats in twilight flying away huddled together as if in mortal terror. At the same time the tree with the child in it began to rise and float away from him. "Are you going, Patsy?" cried the father. "To my mother in heaven with God, who is Love," said the child waving his hands towards him and seeming to rise as the flame mounts upward. In the black hours of the early winter morning the curate was awakened by a visitor knocking at his door. "Is it a sick call?" he asked putting his head out of a window. "A soul sick to death," came the reply. The curate went downstairs and opened the door to the one he took to be the messenger. To his amazement Tom O'Keefe stumbled in and fell on the floor at his feet. "Give me absolution," he panted, "lest I die in my sins." The curate lifted the sinner affectionately and led him into his parlor, rejoicing as his Master before him over the sheep which was lost. The news of Tom's conversion spread far and wide, and if he had drawn crowds to hear him before, more came now, for it was said he had had a supernatural visitation. But Tom had nothing to tell them only over and over again the words with which little Patsy had left him—"God is Love, God is Love!" and as he said it to them, the tears ran down his face. Tom O'Keefe died the other day a very old man, and with the reputation of a saint. He had led more sinners to God than ever he had drawn away from him, with his simple gospel that was the last word on his lips. They say now in that part of the country, when there is a death, or troubles are hard to bear, "Well sure, God is Love, as old Tom O'Keefe, Lord rest him, used to say."—Katharine Tynan Hinkson in Donahoe's Magazine. Habit, like the ivy of our walls, cements and consolidates that which it cannot destroy.—Piccola.

BISHOP SPALDING ON CHARITY.

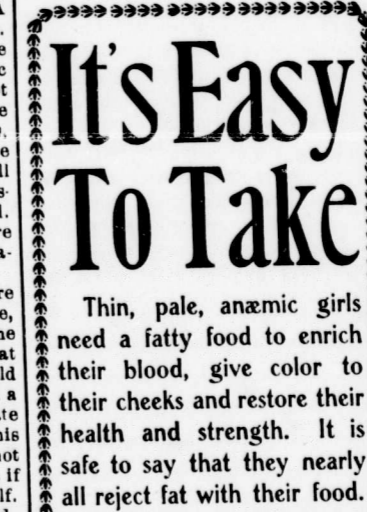
At the recent conference of the Society of Charities at Bloomington the Right Rev. J. L. Spalding was the principal speaker at one of the evening sessions. His subject was "The Preventive Forces of Education." He received an ovation on coming on the platform. He said in part: "Away back when civilization was not what it is now, when men lived the higher sense of charity, there lived the first great Teacher of charity and kindness, the Christ who died upon the cross for others. His is the example of the supreme charity that can exist. He gave His living and His life to those who sinned. He loved His enemies. He spoke well of those who taunted Him. The milk of human kindness in Him was disseminated far and wide and down throughout the ages, until today we find the seeds of goodness and charity scattered by Him still thriving and growing to greater and grander future possibilities. "He of all who lived was a Lover of the outcast. He excluded no human being and there was nothing in His life so remarkable as His loving care for the disinherited of the world. To the criminals, to the abandoned of the world, He spoke words of help and sympathy. His religion summed up His love of God and our fellow man as well as our self. He taught that the criminal, as well as the noblest and the best, are to be loved. Crime is a manifestation of that cherished within, it is the child of sin and ignorance. There is no possibility of its prevention unless we beautify the heart, and uphold the moral nature. We must begin with the interior life of the individual. "The world has passed through four ages in the treatment of crime. These stages gradually slope from the original feeling and desire to exterminate and put away the wrongdoer. Next it was repression, then correction, and to day we live in that broad age when we look not to the punishment of the criminal, but to the fountain head from which criminology springs, with the desire and the purpose of cutting off the source of crime and evil. We have in this age reached a broader period of mind and conscience and our sympathies are going out and we are studying how we can help those who through moral, mental or physical infirmities have fallen. "We must gain an insight into the causes of evil and crime before we can apply the preventive. It may be the mental, moral, physical condition, or the environments or circumstances. There is a vast change in the attitude toward criminals. It can be summed up in four ages. "The leading characteristic of our age and country is the desire to prevent evil. It is characterized by larger sympathy with men, due to the lifting of the life of the multitudes to a higher plane. Since the mass has risen to a higher plane it is natural that the sympathy should be spread, extending to all men. It is held that all men are of the same family with equal opportunities. It is the duty of the country and state to apply the principles in practice through law and public opinion. By scientific progress we are allowed to get at the root of the causes and see the fountain. "The individual is not an isolated product. Every one is a product of his age and heredity, back to the time when his ancestors were savages. A man's influence makes him what he is. It makes a difference in what climate a man is reared, whether in the arctic zone or in the tropics. We cannot control the cosmical conditions. Crime is due to abnormal physical conditions, degeneracy. I hope the day will come when public men and the state will bring their efforts to bear on the question of crime to get the reform needed. Young criminals are increasing more rapidly in proportion than the population. "We must make education more valuable, appeal to the will, conscience, affections as much as we do to the mind. We are all influenced by what we are striving for. We must uphold in man that quality which gives him a terror of degrading sensuality, educate him in self-respect, the value of his own worth and dignity. You cannot give to the young moral convictions if you have not them to give yourself. Morality, like religion, is propagated. The greatest preventive of crime is the heart of a pure, loving mother. Give the young who are to be the hope of the future to the care of men and women in homes who can care for them. It is no use to discuss schools or prisons, for 'like begets like.' "The Bishop said in conclusion: "We must strive to put down selfishness, untruths and unchastity in high places. We must begin at the top as well as at the bottom. The man in high position should be unselfish, devoted to the right and to his country. The great trust magnate or business man must not crush out the life that is left in the poor man. Honesty in high places, the abandonment of a desire for gain and a true charity for our fellow men must be the dominating aims of our hearts. The great tide of corruption that is growing upon the world through unhappy and unfit marriages is an evil that is not to be computed. The licentious, the lecherous, the vicious, the low, the abandoned, have no right to enter the marital state. These persons who either through ignorance or wantonness enter this sacred state, where divorce is daily raising its ugly and venomous head, are starting out on the work of founding a family that will increase and grow, making countless criminals in the coming generations. Like begets like. The appetites, the passions, the capabilities and aims of the parents will appear in the child, and statistics show that vicious

parents are often the founders of a family of criminals. Restrictions of some sort should cover this avenue of growing viciousness that the sources itself might be dried up. Hundreds of the young marry to-day with no greater thought than if they were buying a new suit of clothes or going on a short trip. "Education cannot do all, but it is a marvelous factor in the training of the vicious mind and abandoned intellect. The wholesome training of the home, of the mother, is one of the grandest efforts that can be put forward for the advancement of the youth to a plane where he will not be tempted. Criminals are made largely in the youth before he is twenty-one, and during that formative period is the time when the proper influences should be brought to bear that will start him in the proper channels. The time is at hand to awaken a few who look to God and not to man for recognition in a great work, who love human nature, hate vice and degradation, who scorn the hypocrite in high places, and who will rout out the corruptness in city politics, and work for their fellows without hope of reward."—Chicago New World.

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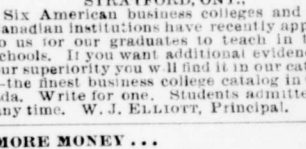


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