

LUNCHEON FOR TWO

He was a tall old man, with a slight stoop and thin gray hair. His garments were shiny with wear, the sleeves of his coat being fairly slippery in their threadbare state. But there was little trace of the infirmities of age in his strong features and the sharp glance of the gray eyes beneath his heavy brows.

From the clock the old man's gaze turned to the door. The desks were deserted. It was luncheon hour. He arose from his creaky wicker chair and crossed the room. There a clock had struck the covered glass. Then he turned back to his desk and reproducing a small parcel wrapped in a newspaper, opened it and disclosed an apple and a few biscuits.

A hand fumbled with the knob, and then the door swung open. A child was standing on the threshold, a little girl with sunny curls and a dainty pink frock.

"How do you do?" said the astonished vision. "Are you pretty well? So am I, thank you." And she made him a little bowing courtesy and threw him a fascinating smile.

"Where did you come from?" growled the old man.

"I came from out here," replied the little maid. "I peeked through the glass under the curtain 'n' saw you. She laughed merrily. "An' I thought you was a big ogre eating all by yourself. You don't eat little girls, do you?"

"You're a splendid ogre," she cried, and clapped her hands. "Much better'n papa. 'What's you eatin'?"

He hastily pushed the biscuits and the remains of the apple aside.

"My luncheon," he answered. "But you haven't told me where you came from."

He was surprised at himself for showing this interest in the child. "I came down to see papa," she answered.

"Mamma brought me 'n' left me here 'cause she's goin' to a shoppin', 'n' there's big crowds 'n' a little girl might get hurt. An' I brought papa lunch, 'n' mamma will call for me. An' I'm to keep awful still, 'cause the man papa works for is very cross, 'n' he can't bear to have children 'round. Please can't I come in a wee bit further?"

"Come in if you want to," said the old man, a little ungraciously.

"She said as soon as she advanced. "It always pays to be polite," she said. "That's what mamma tells me. If I had said, 'Can I come in?' without any please, you might have said, 'We don't want no little girls 'round here to-day; they're such a nuisance.' An', besides, I was a little tired of stayin' out there all alone. 'Cause you see, papa had to go to the Custom House 'bout somethin' pertickler, 'n' I'm most sure I heard a big rat under the desk brushin' his whiskers."

always makes things better than anybody else can. Don't you find it so?" He pounced with the remains of the sandwich uplifted. His face grew more gentle.

"I believe it's a fact that's generally admitted," he said.

The child looked at him with a quick laugh.

"That's just the way papa talks sometimes," she said, "an' I don't understand a word he says. But ain't we havin' a good time, jus' you 'n' me?"

"Why, yes," said the old man. "I think it must be a good time, although I'm afraid I'm a pretty poor judge."

The child regarded him critically.

"You do look pretty poor," she said. "Have another sandwich? Oh, do! I've here some cheese 'n' a nice pickle. Yes, you must. Papa says it isn't polite to refuse a lady. That's when mamma offers him the second cup of coffee."

The old man took the second sandwich, but he frowned a little at the cheese and biscuit.

"Father extravagant," he growled.

"That's just what papa says to mamma sometimes," cried the child. "An' mamma says she knows he'd have hard work to find anybody who could make a shilling go further than she can. We have to be awful careful, you know. There's clothes to buy, 'n' what we eat, 'n' the rent. Why, mamma says she's always afraid to look at the calendar in the face for fear her day has come round again. Where do you live?"

"I live in a house away from town," he answered.

"Can you swing a cat in it?"

"Swing a cat?"

"You can't in our rooms, you know. They're the tenebrous things. We're on the fifth floor, just the porter's a real nice man. He asked me to ask my papa if he'd exchange me for two boys. An' papa said to tell him that he might do for the two boys 'n' a couple of pounds of radium to boot. An' I told the porter 'n' he said he guessed papa wasn't very anxious to trade. An' I told papa what Mr. Ryan said, 'n' he pulled one of my curls and said he wouldn't part with me for all John Ramsey's millions twice over. That's the man papa works for. Do you know him?"

The old man had frowned, and then suddenly smiled.

He laughed again.

"It seems to think I'm worth only my board and clothes."

"Dear, dear! An' he's so very rich. We went by his house once—papa 'n' mamma 'n' me—an' it looked so big and dark. Mamma said she'd just like to have the care of it for a while. She'd let in the air and sunshine, 'n' drive out the dust 'n' the gloom, 'n' she'd try to make life really worth livin' for the lonely old man. That's what mamma could if anybody could. You know Mr. Ramsey. What do you think about it?"

He suddenly laughed.

"It might be an experiment worth tryin'," he said. "Then he stared into the cardboard box. 'Why, look at this!'"

"The lunch has all disappeared! I'm sure I ate more than half of it. Come, now, how much do I owe you?"

"Mercy," cried the child, "you don't owe me anything! I couldn't eat it all, 'n' papa didn't have time. I hoped you liked it."

"It was the best luncheon I have eaten for years," said the old man.

"There is a lame boy whose name is Joe," he slowly said. "He needs a chair. Do you know anything about the price of these things?"

The child's eyes sparkled as she stared at the note.

"Yes, yes," she answered. "Mamma went 'n' found out. You can get the kind of chair Joe wants for \$15. An' a real good one."

"Here's \$25," said the old man. "Get a good one, and tell Joe it's a present from you. What's your name?"

"Elise."

He watched her with an amused smile as she quickly drew a tiny purse from the pocket in her frock and tucked the note into it. Then when the little purse was restored to its place, she looked up at the old man.

"Now," she said, "if you please, I'm goin' to give you a kiss. I always give papa a kiss when he's nice."

set sail for the Flowery Land. She had desired novelty, and had it in very truth. Even her tresses were different from that of other girls. Instead of pretty frocks and hats, she had the ugly Celestial dress made. One thing I felt I must do. My little Lulu was a year old, so I put her discarded baby things into the big trunk, in readiness for any small Li-Hungs who might make their appearance. Clarrie paled when she saw them.

"O Louise, how strange, how unusual, to put a 'layette' with my trousseau! And Li has made me promise that any children we may have shall be brought up in the Chinese way."

"Goodness! What a—I was going to say 'tyrant,' but turned it into 'despot'!"

"I'll do it for your sake."

Then she went downstairs; and Li-Hung, with an inscrutable look in his dark eyes, bore her away to his own land and people.

It was May and the good prior had been presented with a famous Black Madonna from some foreign shrine for the love and veneration of his flock.

As for the certain rustle of her dress, she felt she was a queen, and as such put on the gown she had bought in a noisy city. It was a strange and picturesque scene, vastly different from Maryville, with its gabled houses and Gothic churches. Brightly tinted paper lamps hung over the shops; there were travelling blacksmiths, and itinerant tradesmen of all sorts, from the fish seller with his live fish, to the peddler with his portable kitchen. Long strings to blind men and camels had right of way.

"I'll sell her six," he answered.

"And, Fenton!"

"I'm a cosmopolitan, Louise."

"Yes, I know; but what has your having been born in Ceylon and having been a globe-trotter to do with your marrying a Chinese interpreter, Clarrie?"

"Everything, my stupid cousin! Listen! You and Eric have been living a humdrum life in Maryville for some years. Eric has punctually gone to his business, punctually grumbled if his chop has not been done to a turn and if his morning rasher has been too salt, and (let me do him justice) punctually been Father Ephraim's right-hand in all his undertakings. You, on your part, have also rewarded him; you have been a good wife, a good Catholic. But you've been moose—a woman's joy—and Mary's Town has been your tree. You've never cared to go about and see the world; and I, I came to live with you, I'd rather spend a year in the same place. Now I'm tired. I'd like to see life under novel conditions—to be in the hub of the Flowery Land which I can be as Li-Hung's wife; and, besides, I like him."

"Yes, but Clarrie, he is a pagan; and, though not one of the faithful, you are a Christian. Drop this thing for God's sake and for mine! Tell me where will the ceremony take place?"

Clarrie's pretty face flushed.

"Well, as Li is a disciple of Confucius, and I'm nothing in particular, we shall go to a registrar office. We shan't have any bridesmaids or fuss or honey-moon, but shall go right off to Pekin. Rather different to the usual trip, isn't it? But I can't see why you should make all this 'do,'—you and Eric. Li isn't like a Chinese laundryman. He looks all right in English dress, and speaks our tongue, and is quite, quite civilious."

"The Boxers!" muttered Eric. "Let us give a greeting and pass on."

Rude hands tore my dress, jostled me, and I was jeered at and taunted, with head erect. I said a "Hail Mary" and felt myself torn cold. We were in a terrible fix. Words are powerless to describe it.

"Stop there, you foreign devils!" thundered a voice in English.

"My child—our little Lu! Eric! Eric! They want to steal her!"

He broke off suddenly; one of his followers had aimed a rusty spear at my husband's breast, and Clarissa had thrown herself as a shield before him.

"What is it, White Narcissal?" he asked, as he bent down and kissed her. "This," she said brokenly, "let them go free, and let my little babe go with them."

And it came to pass. We took Lulu and the Yellow Lily to Canton with us; and when I found myself in a friendly merchant's house, I undressed the half-Chinese child and put it into a cot next my own bed. A white ribbon which was suspended the small silver medal I had given to Clarrie; and a mission priest baptised her as Marie Providence.—By Nora Ryeman in the Ave Maria.

The deluge of barbarian invasion that rolled over the Roman Empire between the fifth and ninth centuries swept away, like a heavy flood, the fairer and more advanced civilization.

A hundred years previously Constantine had transferred the seat of empire from Rome, and built his splendid capital by the sunny waters of the Bosphorus.

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forgot the faith he taught as to become the stronghold of anti-Christian hate and the sink of modern pollution.

Just at this period, too, the widowed See of Hippo was mourning the death of the great Augustine. About the time St. Patrick was receiving his commission from Pope Celestine, this intellectual giant was closing his wondrous career. For more than a quarter of a century he stood as the bulwark of Catholic truth against the fierce assaults of error. The ranks of heresy were shattered, and the abject foes went down before the crushing strength of his resistless logic.

Where are they now? Alas! If grief could enter a sainted breast, looking down from the high heavens, he might sigh over the desolation of his native land—the land of Cyprus and Tartarus. The temples that once dotted it have vanished, and their scattered ruins scarce afford shelter to the wandering Arab.

The day Patrick touched our shores, these two sees, Hippo and Constantinople, exulted in populousness and majesty; adorned as they were by the twin stars, Augustine and Chrysostom, they formed the brightest jewels in the Church's crown. To-day they are vanquished as if by the world had never known them, while our nation's apostle looks down on the little island of his love and sees her towering above the Atlantic breakers, a pharos of spiritual splendor, with a faith as unshaken, as her rock-bound shores, the holy city, carrying his banners into the most distant lands of the globe.

"I look," says Newman, "towards a land both old and young—in its Christianity, a nation in the promise of a future; a nation which received the faith before the Saxon came to Britain, and which have never questioned it; a Church which comprehends in its history the rise and fall of an empire and York, which Augustine and Palladius founded and Pole and Fisher left behind them. I contemplate a people that had a long night and will have an inevitable day."

ITS VITAL ENERGY.—THE PAST

In a healthy body we expect to see more than self-preservation. Now, each portion of the Catholic Church is impelled by the spirit of Pentecost. Hence it is not satisfied with mere stagnant existence. It pants for the service of the world as common language.

THE PRESENT

Turn your eyes wherever you will to-day, and two bold facts confront you—the same crying need for supernatural regeneration on the one hand, and the same marvellous activities of our race in pursuit of the apostolic vocation on the other.

THE FUTURE

With such a past and present it is not difficult to forecast the future. Analogies from the histories of other peoples not only render this task easy, but illumine and make transparent one evident destiny of our race.

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The outlook would be disheartening, but see I just when the chilling mists of indifference and infidelity threaten the world's faith with extinction, the Almighty Hand that guides the warm waters of the gulf stream by our western coast to temper with their genial breath the natural severity of our climate—the same Hand is to-day rolling over decaying Christendom the warm waves of Irish faith.

A little nation, enclosing within her own coast but four millions, sees twelve millions of her children carrying her name and faith into every land. They form the chosen regiments of the Church's frontier army that daily wrestles with the forces of infidelity.

Yearly, swarms of priests and nuns and faithful laymen leave our shores, every corner of the English-speaking world they are to be found raising altars to the living God. The church spires that glint glittering crosses to the heavens over the broad stretch of world from Queenstown to Cape Horn are mainly monuments of Irish faith.

When Cardinal Manning beheld the long array of Patrick's mired sons sweeping in procession through the venerable capital of Christendom, he exclaimed: "If there is a saint in the high sanctuary of heaven to-night that has respect to be proud, that saint's name is Patrick!"

As in the early ages Ireland checked the anti-Christian forces of destruction, so to-day we see her in deadly grip with the powers of infidelity.

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