

"Faked Stories"

Under this heading a recent number of "The Catholic Register" described an incident from Ireland which we published in our issue of August 4th. It referred to a poor Protestant woman, who had suffered persecution and violence for having Scripture texts hanging on the walls of her house. Our Roman Catholic contemporary stigmatized this incident as fabulous and ridiculous. We carefully avoided committing ourselves at the time to an absolute belief in its truthfulness, though we really had no doubt of it. But we are now in a position to say that the story is not "faked," that it is not a "fable," that it is not "ridiculous." On the contrary, the facts are strictly true, only they are much worse than reported in the papers. A Scottish Editor questioned the truth of the facts, and two of his readers went over to Ireland to investigate for themselves, and came back convinced of the truth. The woman's name is known, and the circumstances are now unfortunately familiar. We, therefore, desire to say in the most unqualified way that the information we possess is at the disposal of "The Catholic Register," and we are prepared to produce it before proper representatives of the Roman Communion. Meanwhile we say again that this story carries its own significant message to us all. We believe in the fullest, freest opportunity being afforded to everyone to observe his own religious convictions and principles, and in particular we insist that no one has any right to interfere with our religion as expressed and practised in our own home. Unfortunately, however, there are those in the Roman Catholic Church who seem incapable of permitting the use of religious liberty to those outside its pale, but whether in England, or Ireland, or Canada, we demand the right, which we are ready to yield to others, of worshipping God according to our conscience.

"CLOUDS"

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"They feared as they entered into the cloud."—St. Luke 9:34. It was rather natural that they should. They were just three ordinary mortals away up on a mountain side, and had been witnesses, a moment ago, of a most extraordinary phenomenon of spiritual appearance, enough in itself to awaken fear in the hearts of most men. Yet it does not appear that they were in the least disturbed at the sight of Moses and Elijah holding converse with Jesus. Peter was bold enough to break in upon their conversation with an affirmation and a request: "It is good for us to be here," he said to Jesus. "Let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Flijah." They might have been startled; they were no doubt surprised at what they saw; but they were not afraid. It was not until the cloud came that they were conscious of fear. So long as they could see, they were all right; but as soon as their sight was cut short at the eyelashes, confidence, boldness, gladness faded away. It was the cloud that did it; "They feared as they entered into the cloud." The suddenness of it, linked with the strange circumstances would be sufficient for that, but that was not all. The enveloping cloud shut out earth and heaven, and man from man, and gave an air of mystery to the whole thing, as each discovered himself alone. And to the mystery we must add uncertainty: the uncertainty of the issue, the uncertainty even of the meaning of the present. It was the aloneness, the mystery, the un-

certainty that brought the fear. Yet, had the three disciples known that in the cloud there would be glory; had they seen through the cloud to the silver lining at God's side of it, they would not have feared then. They feared because they did not know, because they could not see.

There are other "Clouds" than the vapour-clouds that sit on mountain-peaks, and sweep majestically across the heavens; these come, and are as quickly gone, and leave no trace of the place where they have been. Not so the clouds that come into our human experience; these hang about our path for many a weary day, and, for some, make life "one weary avenue of darkened days," clouded continually to the end of the journey, oftentimes lifting not till they are broken by the sun-streams of Paradise. And yet, in their effect, the clouds that come into our human experience, are the same as the covering cloud that crept down the Hill-of-the-Transfiguration. "They feared as they entered into the cloud," and so do we; and our fear arises from the same cause as theirs—mystery, lack of penetrating vision, uncertainty as to the issue, and uncertainty of the meaning of the present. The clouds come down upon us, and we are sightless, we cannot see through; the mystery of it is beyond our grasp; we cannot see the meaning of their present purpose, or gauge the ultimate issue of the experience; we do not know, we do not understand, we are only conscious of the cloud—and we are afraid.

We all know what are the "Clouds" of our Earth experience, for they are for the most part common to us all. There is the cloud of "Pain," the great mystery of human suffering that hangs forever over the human race wherever its members are to be found. This cloud comes upon us all in turn, and as we enter it we are afraid. It breaks in upon our life and cuts us off from everything but our troubled thoughts and the consciousness of our present helplessness. And even when we ourselves are not in the cloud, the universal cry of pain that rises from our suffering kind turns our questioning minds to the "Why" and the "What," and we long to see through to the meaning and the issue. There must be a meaning in pain, and we are able to see it in part, even now, though there is much that is hidden from our eyes. Pain is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end, and, as far as we can see, it is part of God's education of the race, and has something to do with the perfection of character.

The time will come when pain will have fulfilled its purpose and will cease. The growth will be complete, the work of environment and experience will be over, the soul will stand complete, its imperfections done away, it will be perfect according to the pattern of its Creator. We see the thought in the words spoken about the Lord Jesus, that He was made "perfect through suffering." That the end is often apparently defeated by the means is no more an argument against what has been just laid down, than it would be to say that because a child is made violently angry for the time by being chastised, therefore it cannot be the purpose of chastisement to make the child better. Those who have read the "Sky Pilot," by "Ralph Connor," will remember how beautifully this point is brought out in the case of "Gwen," the wild little girl of the Old Timer. She was as angry as she could be at being laid low with a broken spine, and even the noble "Sky Pilot" began to feel that there would have been more hope for her regeneration in perfect health than on a bed of sickness. But time, love, and tenderness and pain did their certain work, and in a broken body Gwen's soul was made whole. We know that it is often so; the sweetest, kindest, most sympathetic and best people we know of, are generally those who have suffered

most, unless, indeed, they have missed the meaning of their pain. And we do know that "Whoso suffers most, hath most to give."

"In the cruel fire of sorrow,
Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail;
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
Do not let thy spirit quail,
But wait till the fire is over,
And take thy heart again,
For as gold is tried by fire,
So a heart must be tried by pain."

And yet, outside and beyond the little we can understand of the mystery of pain and suffering, we feel that there is so much that, try as we may, we cannot understand at all. "So pathetic is human life, with its broken affections, its little moments of loving, followed by separation, its winding of arms around the life, only to be torn away in an hour," so pathetic is it, that we feel that life, after all, is a mystery and a riddle, and that many of the things that touch us have no explanation here. Not long ago, a clerical friend of mine stood by the death-bed of his young wife, after only two short years of wedded bliss. Like all good men, he had devoted the time before his marriage to preparation for her happiness and well-being when she should come to be with him. And then for two swift years, their joy was full and their sky was clear. Then the "Cloud" came—a final word and a last embrace, and he was left alone, a father with a motherless child, and a life without *her*.

Is there any explanation of that? The immediate causes can be given, of course, but they only touch the surface of the problem. And this, by no means stands alone. Can life's inconsistencies be explained, the struggles, the disappointments, the failures, and the wrongs? Is there anything to help us in the face of these? There is nothing anywhere to explain them, but the thought of the disciples in the cloud suggests something that is at least a help. We are standing in a cloud, and that is why we cannot see, and cannot understand or know. St. Paul, indeed, seemed to speak as if all our life were clouded, and that we can see nothing clearly here: "Now we see in a mirror, darkly," which means that we see imperfectly, or that what we see is imperfect, and not the eternal reality. But whatever it is, it means that because of the shadows of earth, we do not see the real thing; we see darkly. We are standing in the shadows and shall not see clearly "till the day break and the shadows flee away." There is something more to be known, something more to be seen; that is what St. Paul means. "Now we see in a mirror darkly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know fully." And one of the things we shall come to know is that in the cloud there was glory all the while, and that the blackest cloud had a silver lining. Our view of things is broken and incomplete. There is a perfect whole and a completeness, and we shall see it then, though we cannot see it now. As Elizabeth Browning said:—

"On the earth, the broken arcs,
In the Heaven a perfect round."

"Our broken arcs" are only broken by the "Clouds," and on the Heaven side, they are seen "a perfect round." So we must learn to listen in the "Cloud" for the voice of God, and to look through the mist to the light beyond. There are many broken arcs, and many things in this tangled life of ours that we cannot understand, but it is unthinkable that He who made the worlds and holds all things in the hollow of His hand is ignorant, too. He knows, and we may rest assured that "All things work together for good to them that love Him."