

# TO KISS THE CROSS

(Continued from last week)

Mary watched Timmy squirm uneasily and wondered if this blunt, man-to-man approach wasn't going to backfire in Jim's face. She wanted to cry out that the matter had gone far enough. Instead she banttered gaily. "You old braggart! I bet you were scared stiff the first time the teacher made you stay in after school."

"Listen to that!" Jim teased. "She calls me a sissy. Whatever you do," he continued, "don't be a sissy. Fight your own battles from the start. Don't back down even if you come home with two black eyes and a nose bleed. You've got two fists, and you know how to use them."

"Gee whiz, Daddy, I don't want to fight anybody," whimpered Timmy, his blue eyes clouding with repressed tears.

"This has gone far enough, Jim O'Shea," Mary snapped, "you ought to know better than to frighten a poor little boy who doesn't know what it's all about!"

"I won't have it said that any son of mine is a coward!" Jim roared.

Mary was about to make a caustic remark but she checked it. "Don't you think we're both acting very foolishly?" she said mildly. "Probably nothing will happen at all," she added, "and by tonight we'll both be laughing at ourselves."

"Sure, you're right, Mary," Jim replied grinning. "I'm beginning to feel foolish already," he confessed, his temper vanishing as quickly as it had come.

Even Timmy managed a shadow of a smile. The meal was finished in peace.

As she stacked the dishes and

washed them, Mary hummed a song which she had not sung for years. Strangely how a tune could pop up from nowhere and run through one's head almost endlessly. Half forgotten words began to fit into the tune, as it flooded and surged through her mind:

"Oh memories that bless and burn Of anguish, pain, and bitter loss. I count them o'er and try at last to learn To kiss the cross, sweetheart, to kiss the cross."

What sort of memories would Timmy have from this first day of school? Of course, they would be mixed. Her own school days streamed in kaleidoscopic fragments before her, but she could recall nothing about that day, twenty-three years before when she had entered the village school for the first time. Was that the day she learned to spell CAT? She could not remember. Well, the dishes were done and there was no more time for day-dreaming. "Timmy lamb, are you all ready for school!" she called.

"Yes, Mummy," replied her small son, emerging with two scribbled, a ruler and a pencil.

"Where is your eraser, dear?"

"Oh, I forgot."

So many things for a little fellow to remember. Mary thought as she walked over to the truck and stepped on the starter. The roar of the motor brought Timmy from the house. This time, he had all his school equipment. On the way down the road, Timmy sat white-faced and silent, as if he were going to a dentist or to the electric chair. Surely the crowd of talkative boys and girls who were spilling excitement all over the yard would cheer him up and make him feel at home.

Mary brought the truck to a stop on the road in front of the school. She started to get out, but something prompted her to stay in the seat. In a flash she realized that no matter how she might feel about it, these children must not think that Timmy was tied to her apron strings. "All right, dear. Leave your books in the school, and play with those boys and girls until the bell rings. 'Bye, now and good luck!' With a cheery wave of the hand, she drove away.

A passing cloud hid the sun for a moment. A cloud seemed to hang over Mary's mind, too. Timmy's

white face and startled eyes seemed to stare at her through the window-shield as she drove back to the farm.

Home once more, she began to scald the separator and the milk pails with more energy than usual as if determined not to worry. She found herself fairly racing upstairs to make the beds and mop the floors. Work seemed to be done in record time. "I'll have to find more things to do," she said, half aloud, half to herself. Jobs were not lacking. There was mending to do until it was time to put the vegetables on for dinner. She turned on the radio for distraction. A mournful voice was listing all the ills to which the flesh is heir. When this diabolical catalogue was completed, another voice screamed in exultance to illustrate the results obtained by using Sloop's Kidney Pills. Then Sister Sally came on. This woebegone individual was moaning and sobbing over the fact that her current lover had been seen with another woman. She had finally resolved to use desperate strategy in order to reclaim his roving attention. What would she do? The next dramatic episode of Sister Sally would unfold the plot. Meanwhile, were the listeners bored with life, frustrated, weighed down by onerous and unexplained fear? Mary snapped off the radio abruptly and looked at the clock. Twenty minutes past eleven. Timmy should be home any minute, unless he stayed to play with some of the other children at recess.

The door opened furtively and Timmy crept in. "Mummy, they laughed at me, and I don't like school at all," he said sadly. "Why, Timmy lamb, who laughed? You've been crying. Tell me what happened." "The bell rang and then—we all went inside, then—I don't like it, Mummy, why do they have to get that way?" "But Timmy, you haven't told me what happened." "We sat down and the teacher asked us for our names. I got up, like you told me, and said, 'James Timothy O'Shea, Junior' and sat down, and while the teacher was writing it in her book, they all laughed." "They laughed at me . . . They laughed at me . . ." The words heat a rough tune upon her consciousness, a sort of eerie, repetitive dance of sensation. Could anything be more cruel than the mockery of laughter? Not to a shy, awkward six-year-old boy on his first day at school. But then, that did not help much. She must get Timmy cheered up before dinner time, and somehow she must keep this from Jim.

(Continued on Page Six)

# CROSSED NIBS

Essay by D. GREENBANK

(Continued From Last Week.)

It was on the long junior table last winter. The week's essay was "My Hobby". My faith in T. D. was sinking lower and lower, my opinion of yet another English Master was going down with it, both far from gloriously. You see I had no hobby and the Gothic T. D. no ideas. The blowing of bird's eggs had never intrigued me, the nationality of stamps never unjustified me, and all the other lasting interests had somehow not interested me. Oh yes! There were crazes. I came of a musical family, so it was only natural for the piano to be set before me. Then there were model aeroplanes, railways, mechano sets, their roots never took hold. Uncles, for reasons best known to themselves, however, showed a great concern in this side of my life. But whenever they visited I was always without. I had just sold my chemistry set, or the day before exchanged all my bus-tickets for a water pistol, a far more useful thing to help clutter up my play-room. "I haven't a hobby" and nothing more was said until Mother returned with tea. And when he left, whether it be Uncle Tom or Uncle Bill, I again learnt, through my Father, that I was shy. And so I discovered the key to praise was hobbies. Had mine been even deskulling, I am sure I would have been encouraged to spout forth on such an interesting one. My Uncles were shy, but I never checked this theory with Father. By this time I was really becoming worried, for all my thoughts, or rather those of T. D. would not make an essay. However he did not let me down. He brought my attention to the tie I was wearing. And there it was, my hobby. I can not say ties intrigued me, yet the more colour they bore the more they pleased me. And I did have rather a motley collection. So I wrote. But C. J. R. are you to let me down?

A shoe, C. J. R.-R. J. C. An essay on a shoe. That quaint artist — if I had only listened to him. But how could I? Wasn't the school playing St. Oive's that very afternoon? In your day that would have been the big match. C. J. R. And rumours weren't they flashing from boy to boy, row to row until it seemed as if he was the only one not in the know? And yet I did glean a few remarks; but that was only when he looked suspiciously at the rear. Paintings were pinned to the black-board. Some gay, some morbid, and one just dull, just a pair of shoes on a gray background. I think he painted it. He certainly saw amazing things in it. Poverty, hunger, contempt, he saw a tramp slouching in the grimy gutter, every few shuffles stopping to retrieve a cigarette, already enjoyed, badly weathered, looking back hopefully, believing some nite by passed; then pulling his cap even further over his eyes, turning up his collar, pressing hands even firmer down in baggy, empty pockets, and so in the drizzle continuing on his way. He saw — but then what's this? "Belford failed to score!" When reports so drastic came through, how could I pay attention C. J. R.?

Do you remember your most successful term? The crowding and straining, outside the common room, to see the final list, the relief when you heard your name read out by that fellow student, lucky enough to be pinned beside it? You were almost halfway up your class. You had made the improvement your father insisted on. But were you responsible, or was it some former genius? Was it during some exam, your eyes fascinated by the clock, and all the while fear mounting within as its hands put aside time, was it then that your pen strayed over the desk until — click — your nib had crossed as it sunk into some groove, some initial of a form genious? Or was driving preparation that sultry summer evening, you, silently cursing the shuffles, the little distractions, was it then you allowed your pen to meander along the bench beside you, until it stuck in a Gothic M, or a Roman S? Whenever it was you realized you had found a friend. You rushed, with a very armoury of nibs, to that desk for all your exams. You sat beside the Gothic M or Roman S for all your preparations that year. They were inspiring.

And here am I. I know every twing, every cut, every stroke, every slip of his knife. I know his initials C. J. R. J. C. This way then that, my pen up and around. I now know they are not the initials of a genius.

Should you, reader, have suffered under the blows of some new Master, should all the keenness, towards that subject of his, be gone from you, should you put your faith in former students, beware. They can not all be a genious. Above all reader, for I am bound by tradition to some piece of furniture, beware of D — Ah! There's the bell — The end of "prep."

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