

A Garland Of Hope

Stories on the Promises made to Saint Margaret Mary by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Part 2.

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PROMISES.

Made by Our Lord to Saint Margaret Mary in favour of those who practise devotion to His Sacred Heart.

1. I will give them the graces necessary for their state.
2. I will give peace in their families.
3. I will comfort them in all their trials and afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge in life and death.
5. I will bestow abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners will find My Heart an ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall advance rapidly towards perfection.
9. I will bless every dwelling in which an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honoured.
10. I will give priests a peculiar facility in converting the most hardened souls.
11. The persons who spread this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. I promise you, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that Its all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month, the grace of final repentance; they shall not die in My disfavour nor without receiving their Sacraments, for My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

The Fourth Promise.

“I will be their secure refuge during life, and more especially at the hour of death.”

“Oh, Father, don’t ask me that; don’t. I can’t bear it.”

Father Dillon gazed in wonder at the face convulsed with grief, the eyes dark with anguish. It was such an unexpected reception of his charitable plan that he thought at first the boy had misunderstood him, and began to state more clearly, what he meant.

“You must not think that I am asking you to pledge yourself in any way. I have taken a deep interest in you, and I thought that, as you are so eager to learn, it might be as well to give you a chance. A year or two at a good school would prove whether you are destined to be a student or not. Of course, you are free to refuse.”

But he could go no further, for the boy flung himself at his feet in a passion of tears. In a broken voice, he cried:

“I am not free to accept, for I have promised, and must not fail. Let me go into the church for a little while, and then I can come back and tell you all about it.” And, opening the door of the sacristy, he passed into the church.

Father Dillon was completely at a loss to understand the reason of this outbreak. Some months before he had found the boy by the roadside, faint with hunger and cold. It was just after the great Australian Depression of 1890. He had supplied his wants, found him employment, and, later, joy of joys, had instructed him and received the waif into the fold.

The boy’s relish for spiritual things surprised and delighted him — above all, his devotion to the Holy Sacrifice. He had pleaded to be taught to serve Mass, and every morning found him in his place: rain and cold or sultry summer all seemed the same, for the good Father was always sure of finding Frank seated by the sacristy door awaiting him. Many a talk he had with the boy, and learned much of his desire for knowledge, his love of books; but of his home and surroundings he was strangely reticent, and, interested as he was in the boy, he had never known where he lived. The little fellow — he was only twelve — seemed so anxious to avoid the subject that he had forbore to press the question: but now, while he waited for Frank to come back, he could not help thinking that there must be something very wrong in the family relations. Yet the child had been particularly open on all other matters. He said that he was perfectly free to do as he wished — his father was dead, and his mother would not interfere. Perhaps he had concealed some dark secret. But it was no use speculating, so Father Dillon took up a book and waited patiently. He was not kept very long, for soon Frank returned, white-faced and red-eyed, but the young lips were set in a firm line, and the childish voice had a resolute ring.

He knelt down by the chair, and, before the good priest had any idea of what he was about to do, he had caught his hand and kissed it fervently.

“Please, Father, let me kneel here; it will seem easier to me. I thought at first to wait before I told you; it is not easy. The first time I went to confession to you, I told you that I had a terrible trouble, but I couldn’t tell because it was someone else’s secret. I was wrong. I should have told all from the beginning. I am not very old, Father, only twelve, but I feel sometimes as old as a man, for I have had to take a man’s place and do a man’s work. When I was eight, my father died. Ah, how I loved him! He was so good to me, and I was happy then. I went to school, and he came for me always. I never seemed to remember much of my mother, only that she was seldom with us, and father said always that she was ill. I was happier when she was not there, for he never talked or laughed much when she was by. Then came the terrible time when he was taken ill. Day after day, I sat in the room with him, and at night, after they had put me to bed, I used to wait till all was quiet and creep down to his dressing-room, and sleep there, so as to be near him. One night I heard him calling for me, and I went in. I wondered why they had left us together, but soon I knew he was dying. I have never forgotten one word of what he said to me. I was too young to understand all, but I learnt enough to know why mother was always cross and ill. ‘She is a drunkard, Frank,’ he said. ‘I have tried to save her, and I thought I was succeeding, but now I must go. Try, try to save her. Never leave her; everyone will turn against her, but you will stay with her and try to help her. Promise me that.’ And I promised. Many a time I wanted to run away from the misery, but the promise held me. Oh, it has been awful! Our beautiful home, we had to lose it; friends and relations, they never came near us

after a while. Many a night she has locked me out of the miserable cottage we live in now. I had no hope, no happiness, until the day you found me sick and starving. Do you remember, Father? You took me out of hell into heaven.”

“I remember well, my brave boy. But can you be of any real help? Would it not be better to put her into some home?”

“No, no. He said never to do that. He did it once, and she tried to kill herself and others. And now that you have found me work, I can help myself and her, so that she has food when she wants it. And then, too,” his voice sank to a whisper, “I have to go out often and look for her, for she would be out in the rain and cold, and perhaps die there. At first I only looked after her for father’s sake; but now, since you saved me from misery, I have hope — hope that she will die at peace with God.”

“God grant it in His mercy. Now I understand why you cannot take my offer. Never fear, Frank, you will not lose by your renunciation. And you must let me help you in all I can. I’ll find time to give you an occasional lesson, and that’ll be something. But now you must come down and have breakfast with me: they will be wondering what has come to me.”

“Just one moment, Father. I must tell you this. It is not much — at least, I don’t mean that, for it is something very great. Morning after morning there comes into my heart the desire to leave everything and go and prepare to put on these dear vestments, and stand where you stand at the altar. I would give my life if I thought I might hope to say only one Mass.”

There was a long silence, and when Father Dillon spoke again his voice shook: “If Our Lord gives the desire, He can also give the means. Come now; we have waited too long.”

Later, when they were seated in the parlour at the presbytery they had a long talk on books and studies, and Frank’s heart grew almost light as he listened to all his kind friend said.

“And now, my boy,” he added in conclusion, “as I said before, don’t lose hope. Leave all to Him, as I know you will. Your devotion to the Sacred Heart is so strong. I am sure it will carry you through all the trials to come.”

“See, Father,” said Frank, pointing to the picture over the fireplace, “when you brought me in that day and laid me on the couch I felt too ill to look about me. And when I did open my eyes, they fell on that picture. It seemed to me His eyes looked into my heart, and I never rested until you told me all about Him. I had forgotten, you know, for mother never taught me anything, and father never had much time. You gave me the little picture of it, and on the back were printed the promises He made.”

“And which one do you like best? The twelfth, I suppose?”

“No; I love the fourth one best. It seems to suit me; and mother, too — ‘at the hour of death.’ But I must be going now. Good-bye, Father; pray for me.”

It was some months later that Father Dillon, going up to the church one cold May morning, was surprised and troubled at not seeing the boy in his accustomed place. He determined to go immediately after Mass to see what ailed him for a great fear came into his heart. Frank had told him only a few days before that his mother was very “ill,” he called it, and he had seemed greatly troubled and low-spirited.

He had scarcely unvested when there was a knock at the door, and, on opening it, he was confronted by a decent-looking man in labourer's attire.

"Pardon, sir, but the boy was set on me coming to tell you, and he wants to see you, so I promised I'd look in on my way to work."

"Is he ill? It is Frank Grey you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes. Well, he's not exactly ill. You see, she's been bad lately, and last night she tried to kill herself. But he is a brave boy, that; he clung to her and begged her hard. We live next door, and the houses are close. So, hearing him cry to her, I ran into the yard; But I was too late, for she turned on him and flung him away. He fell on the stones, and I thought she'd killed him outright, for he's none too strong; and she thought so, too. Anyway, the shock brought her to her senses. She's quiet enough now, and nursing him well, but the doctor doesn't think there's any hope. But you'll go and see him?"

"I shall indeed," said Father Dillon, shocked beyond measure at the awful tidings. Was this the end of the boy's hopes and dreams?

Frank received him joyfully, in spite of his weariness; there was little or no pain, only the terrible lassitude. From there Father Dillon went on to see the doctor, who, however, could give him little hope. "The boy has no constitution," he said.

Still, as day succeeded day and he grew no worse, the good priest began to hope that the doctor might be mistaken. Frank thought little of his illness in his joy at the change in his mother; she seemed completely altered. The horror of the moment when she thought that she had killed her son had wrought such an impression on her that the old habits and desires seemed to have lost their hold. She had many a talk with Father Dillon, and though, at first, she avoided the subject of religion, Frank's piety woke an answering note in her own heart.

"It makes me feel terrible," she said one day, "to hear him in the night, when he thinks that I'm asleep. He just talks to Our Lord as if he saw Him. Oh, how he loves the Sacred Heart!"

And then the priest told her of his offer, and why Frank had refused it. She wept bitterly, and cried that she was but a miserable creature, and not worth such a sacrifice.

"Yes, you are, indeed," replied Father Dillon, "worth a far greater sacrifice — at least, He thought so, for He made it."

A terrible cry broke from her: "How shall I dare to stand before my God and my Judge?"

"Mother," called Frank from the other room, and she hastened to him — "mother, don't be frightened. Our dear Lord is to judge us, and He loves us so dearly. He has promised to be our secure refuge at the hour of death."

June had passed into July, and still he lingered, but the end was near. "A beautiful month to die in," he said — "July, the month of the Precious Blood. And now, mother dear, that you are so happy and well, I have nothing to live for, since I could never be well or able to walk. To-morrow will be my ninth First Friday. I made them for you, mother, and see how He has answered me. I never thought when I began that my ninth would be your first. I must try to go to sleep early, so as to be awake early: but I feel so tired — oh, so tired! I wish it was morning; it is so long to wait."

But he had not long to wait. When the stars were paling to the dawn he heard the Voice he loved call to him, "Arise and come, My beloved." Father Dillon, summoned in haste, came quickly to him. The Last Sacraments had been administered, and he was about to receive the Viaticum. His voice was almost gone, but he looked pleadingly at the priest.

"Mother?" he whispered.

"Yes," was the answer, "she will receive too. I knew it would give you joy. And be comforted, for I shall find her a place of comfort and rest."

He received for the last time the Saviour he loved so well, then lay for a while with closed eyes, a beautiful smile on his face. But when his mother came and knelt beside him he turned and looked at her — at the head bowed in prayer, the altered face — and the smile became almost seraphic.

"A secure refuge." he whispered. "Oh faithful Lord Jesus!" And with that Name on his lips, he passed into His presence.

Father Dillon is an old man now, and growing very feeble, but people say he is well looked after, and that Mrs. Grey only lives to care for him. No one knows the bond of sympathy between the old priest and his silent, devoted housekeeper. They speak of young Frank often — of his patience, his cheerfulness, and his great sacrifice — and Father Dillon always ends in the same way:

"A beautiful life glorified by his devotion to the Sacred Heart, by his faithful following in his Master's footsteps — a beautiful life crowned by a beautiful death."

Every morning, as he passes out to the altar, he looks to the window he has placed to the memory of his little friend — a window on which is depicted the vision of the Sacred Heart, and underneath are the words of the fourth promise — "I will be their secure refuge during life, and more especially at the hour of death."

The Fifth Promise.

"I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings."

"Now, consider it well, Polly," said Father Byrne. "It will, of course, mean a big sacrifice on your part," touching the books she held, "and these must be laid aside for some time, anyway. But, then, you must bear in mind the position of your family. Of course, you personally could be placed without any difficulty. Sister Agatha spoke to me about you; she is very interested in you, as you know."

Polly smiled, such a wan, fleeting smile, but dared not trust herself to speak. She had hoped against hope that she might be able to continue her studies; only a few months more and she would be able to go up for her examination. And yet, the blow was none the less hard that she had in some way anticipated it. The good priest knew full well what a sacrifice he was calling on her to make, and his heart ached for her. But, after all, the passing of an examination, the acquisition of a little earthly knowledge, are very small things, and the doing of a hard thing for God's sake is one of the greatest of earthly achievements. Polly must give up her hopes, but what a training for her soul, what a pathway of self-denial and self-renunciation was opening before her! How high it would bring her, how near to God! So, though he pitied her, he did not spare her.

“Yes, I heard all that Sister had to say. They would take you in at the Convent and train you for a teacher. But what of the others, dear? Your mother might get a situation; but the little ones, how could she leave them? And you know, my child, that, since your father’s sudden death, your mother has seemed to lose interest in all. The shock well-nigh killed her. It will take months of loving care to arouse her to her old activity. So you must be the head of the family — for some time at least. I have done my best for you all, and, really, I don’t see any other course, nor do I think you could do better in any way. Of course, I cannot, and will not, force you, but you must decide without loss of time, or you may lose the opportunity. Tomorrow morning, after Mass, come round and tell me, and then we can go round later and see the people. But, above all, my child, don’t try to decide by yourself. You know what I mean. Lay it all before Our Blessed Lord; listen to what He says to your heart; then let nothing deter you from following His leading. I intend to offer the Holy Sacrifice for your intention tomorrow morning. God bless you, my brave girl, and help you in your trial.”

Polly stood where he left her — miserable, disappointed, and rebellious. All her fine dreams to end in this — a shop! If father had only lived! He was so proud of her; he would never have wished her to sacrifice herself like this. So thought chased thought across her troubled mind, till by degrees a gentler feeling crept over her, and the tears gathered to her eyes as she turned and entered the church. She sought the shrine of the Sacred Heart, and, kneeling before it, buried her face in her hands.

The short spring day was drawing to a close, and a cold wind from the west swept through the streets as Polly neared her home. Her face was pale, but in her eyes, heavy with weeping, shone the light that is kindled at the altar of sacrifice, and in the young heart were glowing the first sparks of the self-consuming fire.

“How late you are, Polly!” cried a plaintive voice as she opened the kitchen door. “Tim and me is so hungry, and we thought you’d never come, and Joe came home and was so cross.”

Polly had a pang of reproach. She had been spending so much time on her own sorrows, whilst those two little ones were cold and hungry. She hurried to lay aside her books, and in a few minutes, a fire was crackling in the grate.

“Now, Kitty, you take Tim and get your faces washed for tea, and, when you come in, just see what I’ll have for you.”

And having set the table and drawn the curtains, to make the little room look more cheerful, she went in to look for her mother, whom she well knew she would find in her own room, brooding over her sorrow. It required some coaxing to induce the unhappy woman to come to the other room; but once installed by the fire, with the children seated at her feet, she lost some of the listless depression, that was becoming almost habitual, and roused herself to look at Polly, who was bustling about the room.

“You are a good girl,” she sighed, “and I don’t know what we should do without you. Now, where’s Joe? The boy is running wild, instead of being a help to me in my sorrow.”

“Here he is, mother,” said Polly, “just in time for tea. Come along, Joe, and by and by, when Kitty and Tim are in bed, we three are going to have a grand talk.”

“Oh, but I’m going out with the Dempseys,” replied Joe. “You and mother can do the talking.”

“Indeed, and you must do your share, too,” retorted his sister. “You’re ten years old now, Joe, and must help us; besides, you’re the man of the house.” This last sentence was for himself alone, as she feared lest any such mention should revive her mother’s sadness.

So Joe stayed, though somewhat against his will, and when the three were seated round the fire Polly began her tale. She had rehearsed it in her mind a dozen times during the evening, but when the time came to speak the fine phrases and long periods slipped from her mind.

“Father Byrne was talking to me. He asked what we were going to do now, and, of course, I did not know. Then he said we must do something, and — and — old Mrs. Williamson is giving up her little shop, and he thought it might do for us. We ought to have a little money from the Hibernian Benevolent Society, and he will help us to get the rest.”

“But I couldn’t keep a shop, Polly!” interposed her mother. “I never was much good at business even before — before your father died, and now I am all nerves. I couldn’t keep a shop!”

“But I can,” replied Polly, firmly.

“How about your exam?” asked Joe, stung with remorse at his own late thoughtlessness.

“Oh, I must give that up,” she said, bravely, though her voice shook a little. “Why, even if I could keep on and be sure of passing, it would be years before I could earn enough to keep myself. What we want now is to keep our home together.”

Mrs. Blake rose, a flush on her wasted cheek. “My brave, good girl!” she cried, folding Polly in her arms. “How thankful I should be to Almighty God for such a child!”

Father Byrne had just finished his breakfast when Polly appeared. She was still white and sad-looking, but summoned up a smile to greet him as she announced her decision.

“I am more than glad,” he answered, “that you are acting so wisely. It often happens that one has to decide between duty and inclination, and, I fear, duty is often left. But you are going to be a brave soldier in the battle of life, not a coward. You have made a great sacrifice, and you will reap a reward even in this life. Have no fear as to the future, you who are so devoted to the Sacred Heart, for He has promised that He will bless the undertakings of those who honour and love Him. Only, dear child, do not think the battle is yet won, because you have gained one victory, though it is a great one. Every day will bring its trials and difficulties. The soldiers of an earthly prince have many furloughs, but for the soldiers of Christ there can be no resting, no cessation of the battle, until the Captain Himself calls us home to Him.”

“I know, Father.” said Polly, humbly, “and I am so weak and impatient; but when I received Him this morning into my poor heart I had a sweet thought of how He can and does strengthen the weak, and how, if we but keep close to Him, His Arms will be around us always, even to the end.”

Polly needed all her confidence and courage in the trying days that followed. The living rooms attached to the shop were small and inconvenient, and Mrs. Blake seemed to rouse herself from her apathy only to complain and bewail their fallen fortunes. The children got into a way of running about in the streets, and she could not spare time to look after them. Joe, full of enthusiasm at first, soon tired of it, and was falling back into his idle ways, and, worst of all, customers would not come.

She had gone over the stock, had sorted, dusted, and arranged all as tastefully as she could; but their predecessor had been too old to attend to matters properly, and people had got into the way of purchasing their stationery, et cetera, elsewhere. Had it not been for Father Byrne, Polly would have been wretched indeed. He never missed coming a single day, brought little gifts for Kitty and Tim, chatted with Mrs. Blake, and would have purchased all sorts of articles but that she stoutly refused to let him.

“Buy anything you really want, Father, but I won’t sell anything else to you.”

He never failed when leaving to speak words of kindly encouragement. She must not lose heart; patience and confidence, and all would be well.

And before Christmas, his words came true. Customers came, few at first, and then more and more, till she was enabled to renew, and even extend, her stock. Everybody spoke so well of her, now that they knew of her and her brave struggle and she suspected more than one of buying far more than they needed in order to help her. Then one good man, pitying the child — she was but fifteen — in her hard battle, offered to put Joe at a good boarding school, for he was just running wild. And, best of all, her mother seemed, little by little, to regain her health of body and mind, and assisted Polly both in the home and shop. So, when the spring came round again, comfort reigned within that little home.

“Do you never regret your books, Polly?” asked Father Byrne one day, as he watched her deftly sorting wools and silks behind her little counter.

She looked at him for a minute or two, and then said, in a very low tone: “I am learning out of such a wonderful book that I can even forget all the others.”

“And that is”

“The Sacred Heart. Oh, Father! What do I not owe to you for helping us at that time, and, above all, for coming to my aid when I was so lost to all save my wretched self? You took those books from my hands, but you put into them instead this Book of Books, of which I never tire, so full of treasures is it.”

“Tell me, dear child, what do you learn from it chiefly? No, I do not ask you, for I know it. Love and sacrifice, patience and endurance. Ah, you faithful little soldier!”

That was many years ago. Good Father Byrne has long ago gone to his reward. Polly’s once bright hair is faded and grey, the pretty colour gone from her cheeks; but the same brave light is in her eyes, the same sweet smile on her lips. Hers is the cheerfulness of the life that is lived for others. Yet, strange as it may seem, there are people so little discerning as to pity her. “Only a poor old maid,” they say, and some even say how sad it is that one so good and devout should have had no vocation. No vocation! O foolish and slow of heart! Out in the far Pacific Islands a ‘young’ missionary priest (yes, little Tim) mingles with his daily offering of the Holy Sacrifice the name of his beloved Sister, whose life of devotional and cheerful self-denial first drew his heart to God. Here in the city, amid the carelessness and indifference of modern life, two Catholic homes give examples of piety and earnestness; two Catholic families, with the blessing of Almighty God on them, look to her as the cause of their happiness. (Yes, it is the homes of Joe and Kitty,) And of the many she has helped, comforted and guided, of those whom she has led to devotion to the Sacred

Heart, who can tell the number? For on all her work has been the blessing promised, and He on Whom she leaned has comforted and strengthened her through all the long years of labour for others, so that happiness beyond the comprehension of the unthinking multitude is ever hers, and she awaits in peace and hope the words that shall tell the faithful soldier of Christ that her warfare is accomplished, and she may enter now into the joy of her Lord.

The Sixth Promise.

“Sinners shall find in My Heart a source and boundless ocean of mercy.”

After seven years! The moment long looked for, often despaired of, had come at last, and through that open door he might pass now, a free man. The governor’s voice sounded indistinct and far off. Good advice, no doubt, he was giving; but he for whom it was intended would not have listened to an angel. Only one thought in his mind — free at last! But they were asking him something now — what was it? Would he go with either of these gentlemen, who were willing to get him a start in life again, and procure him a chance of an honest livelihood? He refused emphatically.

Was not his time up? Was he not free? Then let him go. And they let him go out in the brightness and warmth of the autumn day. Ah: the sun had never shone like that in there; nor had the breeze ever fanned so delightfully the face of the convict. He crossed the road with quick, uncertain step, and, pausing on the other side, looked back at the mass of buildings, girt by the cruel, high wall. All that he had suffered in there — the slow agony of years! The longing at first for death to bring him release from the life of bondage, and then the fear, the horror, lest he should die before ever he had drawn the breath of freedom. Lastly, the dull apathy, the spiritless discharge of hateful work, the hopeless torpor of mind and heart.

Ten years it should have been, but his continued good conduct brought him some remission of his sentence. He had done with it all. There was but one purpose now in his mind, one bitter hope in his heart, as he walked away from the shadow of the prison wall. Revenge! Revenge!

Was it just that he should have suffered for seven years, and the other, the greater, culprit live in freedom and ease? He would seek him out; face to face, they should stand, and justice should be done. Only he must be careful lest he himself come again within those cruel walls. He wandered aimlessly on, forming plan after plan, but could find no means of revenge without bringing himself into peril. And yet he would not rest until he knew the other was behind those gloomy walls. Then he could rejoice and find comfort in life.

Then a thought struck him. No one knew of his liberation; the sentence had been for ten years. If, then, he could introduce himself to his former friend under an assumed name, he might have a better chance of injuring him. Ah! That was a good plan. But he would want money to carry it out, and how much had he? He drew the few coins from his pocket and counted them, though he knew already their value. Well, they might do for a beginning. He would be very careful, and, once revenge was his, he could make up for past abstinence. A mirror outside a shop caught his eye. He stopped and regarded himself curiously, and though he rejoiced at his altered appearance as being likely to further his schemes, yet his wrath and hatred against the man who had been his undoing increased tenfold as he gazed. Was this, could this white, stern face, with its many lines, be that of the debonair Harold Moore?

Had these hard eyes ever looked gaily on life, or these sullen lips known how to smile? The handsome, well-dressed clerk, whose easy manners and happy smile had made him so popular, was

well concealed under the embittered convict, old before-his time, worn, with a life that had been death to one of his instincts and training. Let Claude Valhance look to himself, for he should pay a hundredfold for this terrible change.

The sound of a bell, clear and sweet, broke in on his bitter thoughts. He started and looked round. The sun had set, and the wind, that had been delightfully cool, became now cold and searching. He was wearied by the unaccustomed exercise, and yet he would not spend from his little store the necessary money for a night's lodging. He would buy some food, and find a shelter somewhere for the night. Tomorrow he would begin his great work. Passing down the street, he noticed the open door of a church, and the idea came to him, why not try to conceal himself there for the night? It would be a shelter, and better far than out in the wind. So, some time later, he crept back and entered. There was no fear of detection; the building was almost in darkness, save for one light and the dim lamps that glimmered round the altars. He stood still a while. In his eagerness to seek shelter he had forgotten that this must be a Catholic church, and, hardened as he was, he hesitated for a moment. But only for a moment; expediency won the day, and he stole into a dark corner and hid himself. He had intended watching lest he should be surprised, but drowsiness overcame him, and in a few moments, he was fast asleep.

He woke with a start. It was after midnight, but the church, that had been so dark, was now transformed. Through every window poured the silvery moonlight, flooding nave and aisle with almost unearthly radiance. In spite of himself, he was touched and softened. Memories of childhood came drifting back — of the home in the little country town of the far-off State. His mother, how she had loved him! And perhaps, if she had lived, he might have been a better man: if she had not died, and left him to the mercy of his father's brother, a cold, worldly man, whose only religion seemed to be worship of respectability and hatred of the Catholic Church. In such an atmosphere, his faith had withered and died, and never till this day had he set foot in the Church of his youth. Yet he could distinguish in the soft moonlight every detail, like, and yet so unlike, the poor little country church he remembered. There would be Our Lady's Altar to that side. Why not go and see if the statue was the same as the one he used to visit, his hand fast locked in his mother's? How burning hot her hand always had been — how tremulous the voice that used to whisper:

“When I am gone she will be your Mother and care for you.” Strange he should remember those words tonight, when he had forgotten them for so many years.

He felt a pang of disappointment when at last he reached the shrine. It was quite different to the one he remembered but — but it was very beautiful. Almost unconsciously, he knelt down and looked up with growing reverence at the statue of the beautiful Mother and still more beautiful Child. The lamps that clustered round shed a softened radiance on the silken hangings, the rich marbles, and, above all, on the sculptured faces; and, as he gazed, he felt his eyes burn with unaccustomed tears; the icy reserve of years melted away like ice before the sun as he faltered the sweet words, “Hail Mary!”

Fear not, poor lost shepherd. The Divine Shepherd is here: the Sacred Heart is open to be your refuge!

Again, he lifts his eyes to the gracious faces above him, and notes with deepening love every detail of the statue.

But what is it on which Our Lady lays her hand? No! Does she not hold it in her hand? — the Sacred Heart of the Divine Child! Come, one more memory from early days, and complete the

blessed work! It was the last time his mother had ever gone to church with him. Her health had failed, so that the end was very near. What was it impelled her to turn back, as she was leaving the sacred edifice, and take her boy, her darling, to the shrine of the Sacred Heart, to consecrate him to It, and to beg It to be his refuge and consolation in the dark days to come? How could he have forgotten that — how could he have so fallen as to have been unmindful of her dying prayers! He rose hastily. “I will seek the Sacred Heart,” he said, and took a few steps across the church. But at that instant, a shadow crept before the moon, and darkness fell on all. Behind him lay the lamps before Our Lady’s shrine. Here all was dark. Not so — one lamp shone like a ruddy star. Ah! He knew what that meant. He fell on his knees and stretched out his arms: “Heart of Jesus, You are there: help me, for I am past all other help!”

It is no longer moonlight, but the cheerful rays of the sun, that light up the church where Harold Moore kneels, assisting once more at the Holy Sacrifice, after an absence of so many years. The hard lines are gone from his face, the sullen curve from his lips. How could they lie there, when peace and joy are in his heart — that heart which in a few moments is to be the throne and guest-chamber of Him to Whom he appealed in his anguish last night? All his sins laid down at the foot of the Cross, all washed away in the Precious Blood! Oh, the goodness and tenderness of the Sacred Heart!

Not one word of blame and anger, only the solemn question: “And do you forgive him now, and have you laid aside all thought of revenge?” the priest had asked in the confessional.

And he answered, humbly: “I have forgiven, and, by God’s help, I shall forget.” Not only forgiveness, but, in His mercy, He has raised up a friend for him, for the good priest has promised to help him to obtain employment, and a new life opens before him.

“Father,” said Harold Moore, “I want to tell you something I learnt today.”

It was months later, and no one would recognise in the quiet, hard working man the haggard convict of that autumn night.

“Well,” replied the priest, “I hope it is something pleasant. But,” he added, “you look very grave.”

“I told you once of a man who led me astray, who enticed me into dishonest dealing and fraud, and then left me to bear all the punishment. I learnt something of him today.”

The priest did not reply, but looked anxiously into his face.

“Have no fear, Father; I am not harbouring any ill thoughts. You asked me in my first confession to you if I had forgiven him, and I answered yes. I thank God I could say that, for he died on that very night that I was in the church.”

“God be merciful to him!”

“Amen! I forgave him when I knelt there before the Blessed Sacrament, and that must have been the very time he died. In his will, he left me a large sum of money, and he left a paper testifying to my comparative innocence. That I rejoice at: but the money.”

“Well, my son?”

“It is for the poor,” he answered, solemnly, “and for the missions, that I may help, however indirectly, in spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart.”
