

# Father Cuthbert's Curiosity Case

## No. 2

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## The Victoria Cross

"The choice of two military chaplains to be Bishops is," said Father Cuthbert, "an event so out of the ordinary, that I suppose you'll want me to tell you a story in some way or another connected with the army?"

"That's just what I've come about," I replied. "You must have, in that wonderful case of curiosities of yours, some little memento of deeds of daring and heroism."

"Well, as you see, there are several war medals. Perhaps some day you shall hear the history of those who wore them, and how they came into my possession. For the present I have something much more interesting. It is a decoration that all brave military men covet — only a few gain it — and to wear it is to be a true hero among men! It is one of my latest curiosities, and came into my possession quite recently. As we have a little time to spare, I will tell you the story of **The Victoria Cross.**"

Bat Hayes and Tom Curtin were boys together in the same standard in our school. They were of quite opposite natures. Bat was a burly boy, as strong as a young athlete, and had not much love for learning. He was, however, a shrewd lad with a retentive memory, so book-knowledge came easy to him, though he always preferred a good game to an instruction. He gloried in his strength; he was a wild, young, untamed animal. When he came into the infant school he fought all the bigger boys, and many a complaint was lodged against little Bat. Later on, in the boys' school, the same reckless spirit seized him, and by brute force he made himself a sort of hero among his companions.

But he was by no means a bad sort of a fellow. He was generous to a remarkable extent, and what he had he would willingly share with the other boys. He was continually getting into scrapes. One thing he wouldn't take the trouble to do, and that was to think. "Bat," I had often said to him, "why did you do that?" "I didn't think, Father," he would answer. He was a reckless harum-scarum boy, whose nature you had only to scratch, and the savage — noble, strong and faithful indeed, but still the untamed savage — appeared.

Tom was quite the opposite in nature and appearance to Bat. He was tall and wiry, and took great pains with all he did. He was a noble-minded boy, loving his games and all outdoor amusements; but one who gave no trouble. He learnt slowly, but he learnt well. Prize-days always found Tom with several rewards. He was a general favourite, and strange as it may appear, he and Bat were great chums. There is often much sympathy in natures which are apparently opposed to each other.

Tom and Bat were both servers at the altar. The latter was very trying in the sacristy; and many a time he was threatened suspension if he didn't keep quiet. I remember the late Cardinal Manning remarking about the Catholic altar boys, "God bless the little urchins! Why shouldn't they be at home in their Father's House? It is a blessing," he added, "which you and I never knew." He was referring to that great privilege of serving in the sanctuary. All I can say of Bat is, that he was very much at home in the church and sanctuary. I remember on one occasion he was serving my Mass at one of the side altars, when a dog got into the church and was creating a little disturbance. It was just at the Offertory. "Go," I said, "and turn that dog out." "Yes, Father," said Bat. Off he went in high glee. There was a yelping, and then a dead silence; when lo! my young friend appeared by my side, and holding the dog by the scruff of the neck at arm's length, exclaimed in triumph "Here he is, Father!" "Take him out at once," I said. Bat obeyed, and returned to his serving.

The boys left school. Tom got a nice situation with a large firm and did well. He was attentive to his duties and we saw him regularly among the servers on the Sunday, and oftentimes on the weekday evenings. He was a member of our athletic club, and still loved games and outdoor amusements. These, however, he never permitted to interfere with his more serious duties. Bat, for a time, kept pretty regular to his church. He could not keep a situation long, but passed from one employment to another. He was still the same restless, reckless fellow — the boy developing into the man. He got himself into trouble for playing pitch and toss on a Sunday afternoon. He was also "run in" for severely punishing a man who had called him a "wretched Irish idolator." When he was at liberty again he came to see me. "Father, you know I couldn't stand that kind of a thing — especially as he commenced to abuse our Blessed Mother — so I went for the fellow. It was worth three weeks 'hard.' I reckon he won't abuse a Roman again, especially if that Roman is an Irishman. He's learnt his lesson. Father, will you look out for another place for me?"

And so time went on. One day Tom came to me, and told me, much to my amazement, that he intended to join the army. "I'm going into the ranks, Father, and I think I shall do well. You know I'm almost a teetotaler and there's little Annie Devine to think of — we've been sweethearts ever since our school days — and so I'll have something to work for. Besides, I'm sure my religion, if I don't neglect it, will keep me straight. At all events I'm going to make a shot at it. And then you see, Father, I've been talking it over with Sergeant Sullivan——"

"Ah, I see how it is, my boy," I answered. The good old drill sergeant was an excellent Catholic and a fine soldier, who had seen much service with the colours. "Well, Tom, I'm sorry to lose you from the sanctuary and choir. The Church and the congregation will miss you, but the army will be the gainer. Be a good fellow and stick to your religious duties."

"I promise you, Father, I'll try my best!"

So Tom went off and 'listed.

Nine months after this I had a visit from Sergeant Sullivan, who informed me that he had come to speak to me about Bat Hayes. "Bat, your Reverence," he began, "is a rough and ready fellow, with plenty of pluck, lots of daring and a strong chap too, and just cut out for a soldier. I've been

persuading him to join. There's his old chum, Tom, getting on splendidly, and all his mates talking about him. Well, I think it will be best for Bat to join Tom's company. He'll never do well in civil life, he isn't cut out for it; he can't keep a place for any length of time, so I've persuaded him to try his luck as a soldier."

"But, sergeant," I urged, "you know lately he hasn't been quite so steady as usual, and for him you know what that means. In the army, drink is the great curse. Don't you think it may develop if he gets among a lot of fellows more reckless than himself?"

"Give him a chance, Father! I've told him to come up and see you. He says he's almost ashamed, you've been so kind and good to him. Now, even that, I take it, isn't a bad sign. I think camp discipline and Tom's example — you know what your Reverence is always saying about example — will keep him pretty straight, if anything can."

"Send him to me, and I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks, your Reverence!" and with a military salute and a cheery "Good day, Father," the sergeant departed.

Bat came, and we had a long talk about the past, present and future. I gave him a rosary and a medal — for of course he had lost his — and a prayer book. He went off in good spirits, and after some time came up to show me how he looked in his uniform; he was mighty proud of it I can tell you. A finer and more manly fellow you wouldn't clap eyes on in a day's journey; his well-built and strong frame showed to perfection under his scarlet tunic.

Some years had passed and Tom had risen by rapid promotion to the rank of colour-sergeant. A more respected man there wasn't in the regiment. As for Bat — well, he was still the same careless fellow as usual. Happy fellow well met with everybody. He was a great favourite with his Company. At athletic sports and gymnastic exercises none could beat him. He was a young lion in strength and in courage, but withal he was as gentle as a kitten unless he was roused. It can be easily imagined that he was still one of the rank and file. When he got his good stripes, he got himself messed up in rows, or sometimes transgressed in the way of drink, and had the misfortune to be always found out.

"You see, Father, it's just my luck; I'm afraid I shall never make much good of anything," he said one day in explanation to me. "Yes; I know Tom is an example to me and to all the boys — but we ain't all Tom Curtins; worse luck for us. There's Tom, now, married to the best little girl in your whole parish, Annie Devine, and he richly deserves her; and I wish him every joy and happiness and continued good luck — but his luck is his luck and it isn't mine. Well, perhaps I'll get steadier some day and do some good work before I die. Pray for me, Father, for our Company's off to India in a week or so, and I mayn't see you again. I've got the big medal of Our Lady you gave me, and I always wear it. I'll keep as straight as poor old Bat can — and I know Tom has told you he's leaving Annie and their little one behind, and probably, as she'll be coming up to live with her mother in your parish, you'll hear of us; and I know you'll be kind to the little one and Tom's wife, and I'll look after Tom for his own and for Annie's sake. Ah! it does a scapegrace like me good to see two I've known from my schooldays so happy. I'm bad enough as it is, Heaven knows what I should be if it weren't for Tom's kindness to me and his good example!"

And so the two friends went to India.

One of our little wars had broken out. The hill tribes had risen, and you remember the Afridis caused us a good deal of trouble, and a fair number of lives were sacrificed in that expedition before the tribesmen were conquered and peace restored. One afternoon, when one of the fiercest engagements was taking place among the hills, and the British troops were hard pressed, Tom was shot and fell, severely wounded. Nothing could be done for him at that time, and as the troop moved forward in the charge, poor Tom was left behind. The terrible tribal enemy were creeping down the hill to despatch the wounded. One or two of the poor fellows attempted to crawl away. Some were slain.

Bat had watched in agony the fate of his chum. His company had been ordered to the left, and Bat, who knew every inch of the ground, could see by the lay of the land what danger awaited Tom and his fallen comrades. There was no time to think, and Bat didn't think; he acted. As the enemy crept stealthily down the slope, revolver in hand, he broke from the ranks and made for his friend. He reached him, and as he lifted Tom in his arms the enemy was upon him. "God help us!" he cried. His first shots told — two of the tribesmen fell: but they seemed to increase in numbers, and rushed on him with wild shouts and horrid imprecations. The fire from his own company, a few hundred yards away, kept them off for a few moments, and in that time Bat had Tom on his back and was racing for his very life with the bullets whistling about him. He fell once, twice, but staggered to his feet with his precious burden, and literally dragged himself and Tom into safety.

In the hospital, some days later, Bat came to see me. He had come home on sick leave. He proudly pointed to his corporal stripes, and said "Never has a drop of intoxicating drink passed my lips, except by way of medicine in hospital, since the day that Tom and I came safe out of that terrible fight. I remember that night, when we were in camp and I had found out my wonderful escape, my old companions and the officers drank my health. 'Won't you take a drink, lad, yourself?' they asked. So I stood up and said: 'Gentlemen, boys, drink has been my curse. I promised when we went into to-day's fight, that if I came out I'd have no more of it. Water is good enough for some of the best men in the company, and the army for that; and for the time to come, with Heaven's help, it shall be good enough for me. Don't tempt me, boys, or my hot Irish blood may get the better of me.'" "And I suppose they laughed at you," I said. "Not they!" he answered; "they looked a little surprised, and several shouted 'bravo,' but they've none of them ever asked me to have a drink with them since that time. I'm a strict teetotaler now, and hope to remain so. It was the only thing for the likes of me. You always told us example was the best sermon. I know it is now; and my trying to be steady has helped other boys in the company, good honest fellows they are now, to turn over a new leaf. So you see, Father, at last your wild Bat has made a real start; and please God I won't disgrace myself, or my religion, again."

I rang the bell and had tea brought up for my young friend and myself. I am sure I don't know which of us was the happier, the heroic soldier or myself. We talked of the past, of the mission, of the future. At length he rose to go. "Father," he said, "I'm off now to see Annie and the little one. They are expecting a visit from Uncle Bat, as you know they call me. I've brought them some little presents, but I won't show them to you, I'll give Annie the pleasure of doing that, as I know she's one of your good children and glad of an excuse to have a chat with your Reverence. Good bye for the present, Father. I shall see you again soon. Many thanks for all your kindness and goodness to me. Perhaps I shall live to do a little good yet before I die."

"Good bye, my boy," I answered; "I'm proud of you; and by God's help you'll persevere."

It was not very long after Bat had left, that a messenger came in great haste from the hospital. A young soldier, in an unconscious state, had been brought into the accident ward. Nurse Sullivan, a Catholic in charge, thought he must be one of us, as he was wearing a medal of the Blessed Virgin. Would I go at once?

When I entered the ward I found that the patient had recovered consciousness, and that the doctors did not apprehend any immediate danger. To my great amazement and sorrow, I discovered that the patient was no other than my good young hero, Bat Hayes. After attending to him spiritually I told him to keep himself very quiet, and promised to come round again and see him as soon as possible.

From his own after account, and the story of bystanders, I learnt the following particulars of the brave man's accident.

He was on his way to see Tom's wife and child, and to give them their little presents, when he heard a cry of fire and saw a little crowd hurrying in the direction in which he was going. He hurried along with them, not noticing indeed which way they were going. As they approached he saw a little packed crowd standing in front of a house from which smoke was issuing, especially from the ground floor and basement windows. A woman in the crowd cried, "Save my daughter, she is upstairs; save my daughter!"

Bat soon pushed his way through the crowd. "You stupid idiots," he cried, "why don't you help," and he dashed at the door. It was fastened; but he flung his whole weight against it, and it flew inwards. He heard a voice crying for help. In a moment he was lost to the crowd, and the dense smoke rolled out of the open door. It was not long before he appeared bearing in his arms the form of the woman whom he had rescued. It was not really long, but to that mute and astonished crowd it seemed an age. How they cheered when they saw him! He rubbed his eyes and looked at the face of the woman he was bearing — she had opened her eyes and was saying "Oh, my little child, save her; my little child." It was Annie Curtin. He gave her into the care of the crowd. A great heart and a brave spirit takes no time to ask questions, but grasps at once the situation of danger and never hesitates. He had dashed once more up the burning staircase; so they told the firemen who had just arrived with the escape and engine. These men lost no time in fixing the escape and in breaking-in the first floor windows. Just then Bat appeared. He handed the little child, wrapped in a blanket, to the fireman, and then struggled out on to the sill of the window. He heard a mighty deafening cheer and saw the dense crowd. But that was the last he heard, the last he saw, of the scene in which he was playing the hero's part; his brain reeled, his foot slipped, and he fell into the street beneath.

I visited my brave boy, Bat — for he loved to be called my boy, and he would often say "Well, after all, I'm your boy still." He was most resigned and full of gratitude. He won the love of all who nursed him and cared for him. Doctors and nurses were loud in his praise. "He must suffer a great deal," said the physician to me one day; "But he never complains, scarce ever murmurs. I've often seen him, when he hasn't known I was watching him, clench his hands and set his teeth, and with closed eyes, his white lips move as though in prayer; then great drops of perspiration stand out on his forehead. Yes, I'm sure he suffers a lot, but he will scarcely let on. We can't save him."

When I used to speak to him about his pains he would say: "Yes, Father, it's a bit awful at times, but then I've seen better fellows than I am suffer ten times more. And see all the comforts and care and kindness I have. I know you are praying for me, and the people, and you said you'd asked the prayers of the children of the dear old school, so I've everything."

The end drew nigh. It had been a time of patient suffering. All the grand qualities of the hero's nature manifested themselves on that bed of pain.

"Father," said my brave boy, "I've seen Annie this morning, and she brought the youngster to see poor Uncle. But I think it's the last time. The good nuns who come to visit me here are so kind. They comforted Annie, and she and the little darling bade me good-bye — and the sweet innocent put her little arms about my neck, and said: 'Don't cry, Uncle Bat, mother says God will take you to heaven for all you've done.' Then the child kissed me again. I must have been very weak — perhaps I fainted — but I thought I saw a very beautiful Mother with a lovely Child who stretched His tiny hands and said: 'Welcome home!' I awoke; the nurses and the nuns were around my bed, but Annie and her child had gone. Father, take my Victoria Cross and put it in your Curiosity Case — and sometimes tell my story to the boys of the dear old school. Perhaps it may make some of them try, at least better than I have tried, to be brave lads — it may encourage the bad ones to try again — it may be a lesson to them that it's never too late to turn over a new leaf. If I hadn't given up the drink and tried to be steady, chances are a hundred to one that I shouldn't have been on the spot to save Annie and her dear little one."

Tears came into Bat's lustrous eyes and fell down his cheeks. He stopped awhile and controlled his emotions.

"Don't mind me, Father, I'm very weak just now," he continued, as I pressed his hand. "I am going home! It will soon be all over. I've been a wild, reckless fellow and missed many and many a chance. The good nuns have read to me some of the prayers in your little book — and I've never, thank God, denied the Faith! Ah! that is a beautiful prayer — they are all beautiful prayers. If you're near me when the end is coming, and I'm really dying, I know you'll read them over me."

"Shall I read just that little one now."

"Yes, Father, it comforts and consoles me so, you can't think."

I read: "Remember, O Lord, he is Thy creature, not made by strange gods, but by Thee, the only loving and true God. ... Let his soul rejoice in Thy presence, and remember not his former iniquities and excesses which he has fallen into through the violence of passion and the corruption of his nature. For although he has sinned, yet he has always believed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: he has had a zeal for Thy honour, and faithfully adored Thee as his God and the Creator of all things."

"No, Father," he broke in, "not faithfully! I've been a harum-scarum, rough and tumble kind of fellow. I've been a real wild chap — a bad son of the Church — but perhaps God will accept my worthless life — perhaps He will — with all the pains which are nearly over now — and I leave myself in His hands who has always cared for me and loved me. God has been so good to me: given me good friends, bodily health and strength, and a heart which never knew what it was to fear man. I wish I had feared God more. I fear Him now, but I trust Him more than I fear Him. I know all you have told me that He said, and I just take Him at His word. I don't deserve all His goodness — I can only do one thing, and that with all trust and willingness I do. I give back to Him freely the life He gave to me."

These were his sentiments expressed in his own way. It was a beautiful death, that death of my brave boy. A strong life battling till the last.

Conscious almost to the very end, his whole being seemed absorbed in that beautiful thought so encouragingly put in Father Faber's hymn:

"O, is there a thought in the wide world so sweet As that God has so cared for us, bad as we are,  
That He thinks for us, plans for us, stoops to entreat, And follows us, wander we ever so far?"

Listening to the beautiful prayers that he had come to love so well his spirit passed away. The wild boy, the brave boy, the true hero, the grand penitent: who had given his life for his friends, had gone, we all trusted, to hear the sweet voice of the gentle Master exclaim "Welcome Home."

They gave him a grand military funeral, as befitted his heroic deeds. At the grave I spoke briefly of his life, his heroism, and his death. Tears were in many an eye that had forgotten what it was to weep; and at the open grave there came a throb, a warm wondrous throb of love, which was not of earth, into many a heart which had grown cold and hardened in a careless world. The words of the voice are but sounds; the voice of example is as thunder.

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## Sally

One of my greatest pleasures is to discuss with my good friend Father Cuthbert questions of Natural History. Many have been the interesting conversations we have had on the subject of domestic pets. Together we often revisit Petland and review the pleasures we have each found in the affection and fidelity of the animal creation. Those who have themselves experienced the confidence of these little friends in fur or feathers delight to hear any new story of such friendships. On one occasion my friend, pointing to a photograph of a coster's donkey and cart, beside which stood a little girl, related to me the following story of **Sally**.

My first introduction to Sally came about in this way. I was taking the census of a certain portion of the Mission. In a very comfortable and scrupulously clean little room I was seated with my book and pencil ready, and asked the question:

"Let me see, how many are you in family?"

"Why you know, Father, there are four of us."

"Four of you? I thought there were only three."

"Well, you see, Father, it's this way: there's me and the missus — that's two — and little Minnie there — that's three — and Sally — that's four."

"And who on earth is Sally?" I asked.

"Why, have you never seen our Sally? Oh, she is a little beauty, she is, I can tell you. Sally is our dear little moke; and if you only knew her as we know her, you'd understand how she's a regular one of the family. Isn't she, Minnie?" asked Tom Morley, addressing his little child.

"Yes, Father Cuthbert," said the little one; "and we do love her, all of us, don't we, mother?"

It was evident that Sally was a great pet with Tom and his wife, Bridget, and their frail little daughter.

"When Sally came over from old Ireland," said Morley, "she wasn't much bigger than Bill Robbin's big dog. But she's grown considerable since then, and a better donkey there isn't in all London. She

has her likes and dislikes, has Sall, and as for boys, well, she simply can't abear 'em. I s'pose as how they must have ill-treated her somehow or other — perhaps when she was a little un — anyhow she can't abear 'em. But little girls she don't mind at all: in fact, she seems to have quite a liking for them, and as for our little Minnie, why, she can do just what she likes with her. I've always taught the child to be kind to animals — and it came quite natural like for her to be kind to Sally. You can do anything with donkeys, Father, if you're only kind to 'em, and treat 'em as you ought to treat 'em. That's my experience."

"And have you never found Sally stubborn?" I asked.

"Stubborn! Lor bless you, no, she ain't stubborn, but she has a bit of a will of her own, I can tell you — and she's that artful, she knows what's what, and no mistake."

"But people say that donkeys are so stupid."

"Stoopid?" rejoined Tom, with a hearty laugh, and clapping his hands on his knees. "Well, that is a corker! Stoopid? I wish them as calls Sally stoopid was only just half as cute as she is. Why, when you come round and has a look at her little stable, you'll see as how I've had to put a padlock on the door of the little place where we keeps the hay and the oats. Sally was that knowing that she soon found out how to lift the latch and go in and help herself without asking why and wherefore. And she didn't forget to shut the door after her as some wiser folks does. We wondered how on earth the hay and the oats went, and where they went to, till one day we found Sally helping herself. Stoopid? Well, well, them as calls donkeys stoopid don't know what they're talking about — them's my sentiments."

It was not long before I made a visit with Tom Morley to Sally's stable. This was my first introduction to the pet of the Morley family. The stable was a picture of comfort and cleanliness: the little home of the coster was reflected in the home of his donkey, his good and faithful companion. The fresh straw, the airy ventilated little stall, the bright harness and the well-appointed barrow, all told the good man who loved the beast who shared with him his labour and his toil. And Sally was indeed a beauty. They say people sometimes fall in love at first sight, and I must own that Sally captivated me, and won my esteem, admiration and affection. Her light grey coat was sleek and shining, the limbs were well proportioned and the black cross on her back and sides was marked and distinct. She was a perfect specimen of a well cared for, and well fed animal-help of a kind master. In Morley's words, "She was a beauty, and no mistake."

"Sally," said Tom, "here's his Reverence coming: ain't you pleased to see him?"

Up went the head, there was an almost intelligent light in the eyes, a motion in the ears and a quiver of the body as Sally replied by a prolonged hee-haw, which rose and fell till it eventually subsided into a not unmelodious bass, so low that it seemed to proceed from underground.

"You see you are welcome, Father," said Tom; then turning to his faithful donkey he said "I think them there boys are coming, Sally."

Sally stiffened herself, bent back her ears, slyly glanced with a backward glance of the eye, gave a perky twitch with her tail; then came just a little quiver of the body, and a slight and sudden motion of the hind legs.

Minnie Morley was a very delicate child of nine years of age. Her pale face and lustrous dark eyes spoke eloquently of the cruel disease which was at work in the little frame. She was a cheerful child

and, like many another who suffered from consumption, was remarkably intelligent. Her long hair was of a light-brown shade, and seemed shot with gold. It was a sight never to be forgotten to see that little child with her arms around the neck of the faithful animal. Sally seemed to feel the influence of the child, by whom she was petted and allowed herself to be coaxed and persuaded easily. As Tom expressed it "She can do what she likes with Sally can Minnie; that she can!"

On Sundays the child used to go out with her father. While he proceeded on foot, she was carried by Sally. A friend of theirs, a carriage maker by trade, had built a novel kind of a side saddle, which always reminded me of an Irish jaunting-car, and on this the child sat. The animal seemed proud of her burden, and stepped out with a firm and steady step. Often on week days, too, as the child grew weaker, her father would place her in the front of his well-arranged and tidy barrow, and Sally never resented the extra burden she had to carry. The coster, with his frail child and handsome donkey, was always welcomed on his round, and many a little delicacy was bestowed by the customers who knew them so well and spoke so highly of them.

But the little frame of the child grew weaker, the eye brighter and the mind stronger. She was dying the "death of the predestinate." The soul seemed to shine through her features, and the frail form was almost transformed by an inner light. Who has not watched the progress of that wondrous disease which seems to change the child almost into a woman, and in a few quick short months to develop marvellously the soul's faculties? It was only on very bright and sunny days that the little girl could now enjoy a brief ride, and receive the devoted services of the faithful Sally.

"You'd be surprised, Father," said Tom, "if you saw the difference there is with Sally when our little one is with me. She does seem pleased to hear the youngster's voice, and proud to have her with us. Them two understands each other in a way that's most amazing! When Sally hears me coming, she pricks up her ears and looks round and then straight at me as much as to say 'Where's Minnie?' And when we go round to the house and the child is brought down and puts her little thin arms round Sally's neck, and gives her a kiss and a bit of sugar or some carrot; well, it makes the tears come into my eyes, it does!"

It was evident that the end was coming quickly to the patient little sufferer. She was growing very weak and very frail. As Tom said "There was scarcely nothing left of her." But the mind was bright and the intelligence keen. I need not dwell on the beauty of the closing days in the life of that delicate human flower which bloomed so brightly in the close air of that side street. When the sun shone very warmly, and the child could bear it, they brought Sally round from her stable, and Minnie into the street for a few brief minutes. But when the child said she was "so tired; oh, so tired!" they took her in and laid her exhausted on her little bed. Strengthened with all the rites of Holy Church — living already more in the great unseen world than in the present — the frail child neared her end.

"Don't cry, mammy," she said one day; "and father," she added turning to Tom, "will you do something for me when I'm gone home? I mean when I am dead."

We listened then to Minnie's strange request.

"When you take me to bury me, will you promise to put my little coffin on Sally's back, and let her carry me to my grave?"

They promised their darling child, and she was happy.

The sun was setting over the great city. A rosy gleam seemed to pervade the little chamber of death. A great light lit up the wondrous eyes of the child, and a brightness shone on her face; the hair seemed to emit rays of gold; the weak voice whispered "Good bye!" The treasure had been taken by angels' hands back to its Master and its Lord; and the empty beautiful casket was all that remained to the surviving parents in that darkening room.

They carried out the child's last wish. Faithful Sally followed the hearse to the cemetery — fitted with a strange saddle. The little coffin of polished wood, with silver nails and fittings, was placed upon this saddle and thus carried to the grave. It was a strange sight, and a novel one, but it was a child's request, and we felt that we must carry out the simple desire.

Poor Sally! did she realize the burden she was carrying — who shall say? Who can tell the senses and the strange faculties with which such animal natures are gifted?

Poor Sally! She never seemed the same again. Within a year her gentle life of usefulness was ended. Sally was dead.

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## The Indian War Medal

"Worldliness is the great obstacle to conversions to the Catholic Faith in this country," remarked Father Cuthbert to me the other day. "If Catholics were less worldly the work of conversion would go on apace. By their works you shall know them. Many and many a soul is kept out of the Church by the worldly example of those who are bound to give good example. Men don't judge of our religion so much by the beautiful logical conclusions of its truths and the natural result of its ceremonial worship. They are led to enquire and to be drawn to Truth by the sweet unworldly lives of good Catholics, who live in the world, and are yet not of the world. The human race longs for sympathy, and the cold worldly hearts of Catholics can never attract it. The smoking flax gives no heat — the bruised reed is not much of a staff and stay. 'Alas for poor human nature!' wrote the late Father Dalgairns. 'When once the soul is entangled in the giddy vortex of the world, it clings with a tenacity to it, which is perfectly marvellous, and the result is a character utterly spoiled and a heart thoroughly corrupt.'

"I'll tell you a little story which illustrates what I mean — how worldliness hinders God's work of conversion. But," added Father Cuthbert with a smile, "grace is stronger than the world, and God works in His own way; and His Truth remains and prevails in spite of the obstacles placed by worldly Catholics."

So he told me the story of **The Indian War Medal**.

The Upjohns lived in a pretty villa on the banks of the Thames. They had struggled into an independent position in life, and were well received by the polite society in their immediate neighbourhood. John Upjohn had proved the truth — in his case at least — that there was nothing like leather. He had amassed a not inconsiderable fortune in the boot trade. His good wife had been a well-to-do tradesman's daughter, and soon after her marriage with honest John she became a Catholic. Providence had blessed them with only one child. John was a handsome man, and his wife was a fine woman and well looking: their daughter was a beautiful girl. It is needless to say that Lucy being an only child, bright and intelligent and very beautiful, with all her whims and fancies satisfied by over-indulgent parents, grew up somewhat spoilt. She received her education at one of

the most successful convent schools in a bright and cheery spot where the ever-extending suburbs of the great metropolis straggle into the country.

Lucy grew up very talented, somewhat silent and reserved and cold in manner, but remarkably beautiful. When she was twenty-three years of age she married Colonel Larch, of the Fernshire Buffs. It was a good marriage as far as the world goes, and Lucy received the congratulations of her many friends, and useful and useless presents in abundance. The Colonel, not a Catholic, was one of those open-hearted men that we so frequently meet in everyday life — men with little or no religious feelings displayed to the world, but with large, kind hearts. They have never been under the influence of a living Faith, and therefore their kindly nature goes out in affection to things of sense. Soon after their marriage the Colonel's regiment went to India, and thither journeyed the newly married couple.

Some few years passed. John Upjohn and his wife were dead. The pretty little villa on the Thames had passed into strange hands. The Colonel and his beautiful wife were still in India. They had no children.

Colonel Larch I had never met. His wife I had not seen since she was a girl at the convent where at times I visited the good Reverend Mother and the devoted nuns. Lucy never communicated with them, and they had not heard from her since her marriage. This clever and refined woman had her own views of her responsibility and work in the world. She practised her religion in her own peculiar way, and when she became known to the Catholic clergy she informed the priests where she happened to be that she did not wish them to call upon her. All her surroundings and the whole atmosphere in which she lived was protestant worldliness; there was a refined and educated imitation of polished ungodliness in her whole being and her everyday life. The beautiful woman attracted to her the polite society by which she was environed, and her husband was exceedingly proud of the mighty fine lady whom he called his wife. He was devoted to her and never spared her the satisfaction of a wish or whim.

It so chanced that General Larch, for such was his rank then, and his wife came to live in the aristocratic part of our mission. I found it out in this way; one of the servants came to me and told me she was living in Silver Pheasant Square, and that her mistress was a Catholic. She said "Do not on any account visit her. It would be as much as my situation is worth if she even knew that I was a Catholic. She will not, if she knows it, have a Catholic in her service. No one but the cook knows about my religion. I have to keep it quiet." And so it happened that I heard some little news of the family. The General had left India invalided, and was in very poor health. They did not entertain many friends or give many late dinner parties; but the lady, I was informed, seemed thoroughly to enjoy life — she was always out at balls, receptions, parties and entertainments of one kind or another: then there were her drives in the park, and the evening theatre. She saw little, very little, of her sick husband. It was true that he was waited on by a professional nurse and had all the care and attendance that money could procure; but the sickroom had no attractions for the woman whose grace and beauty were the theme of every gathering in the charmed circle of society. It is needless to say that our church was not aristocratic enough to attract this great lady.

To my great surprise one afternoon I received a little note from the General asking me if I would call round and see him at a stated time. Of course I kept the appointment, and then understood how it was that I had been asked to call.

"I have had a long letter from an old army comrade of mine," said the General, "who is now in India. He has married one who knows you well, Father Cuthbert, and he desired me to see you and give you all the news, as his wife tells me that your church is in this district." He then entered into a long conversation about his friend, and his friend's wife.

I sat down in the sick man's chamber and talked of things that I found most interesting to him.

"Ah!" he said, as I rose to go, "I am indeed delighted to have met you, Father Cuthbert. You will be surprised when I tell you, but you are the first Catholic priest I have ever talked with. My wife is a Catholic, but she has no Catholic friends, and her clergy have not visited us." I could, had I so wished, have told him the reason why. He continued, looking at the clock, "I declare we have been talking nearly an hour. It has been the most pleasant hour" he said, with a slight sigh, "I have spent for a very very long time. If I am not asking too much of you, may I ask you to call again about this time as soon as you can. You have cheered me up greatly. Do come as soon as you can!"

With the exception of the mention of his wife's faith and that of the wife of his friend we had not mentioned the subject of religion. My old love for natural history came in splendidly: we talked of horses, dogs, elephants, tiger-hunts, pig-stalking and the rest. Then a little bit about the theatre in the days of our youth, and a little about our great Indian Empire, and the hand of the clock went swiftly round.

"You will come again soon, won't you?" he said, as I left the sick room.

It is needless to say that I went again and again about the same hour of the day, and had a little talk of a quarter or half hour with the General. I never spoke to him on religious subjects at that time. I saw that all about animals interested him in the most wonderful manner, and I raked up all my experiences and anecdotes, and we got along famously together. One thing struck me, and that was that I had not seen his wife; nor had he so far spoken of her except in the few brief words mentioned in our first interview.

"I am so glad you come to see me, Father Cuthbert," he said, at the end of my fifth visit. "You can't tell what a comfort it is to me to have found some one to talk to on subjects which occupy my mind a good deal. It is indeed good of you to come. You do cheer me up wonderfully. To tell the truth I was getting frightfully low, and oh, so lonely! Do come to-morrow, for I want to have a long talk with you."

The next day he opened his heart to me, and told me all the cares and troubles of his life.

"I have everything that money can furnish. There is only one thing I need — sympathy. I am so lonely! My wife — she is beautiful; she is good, I firmly believe; but I am a poor broken-down man. When I was in health, wherever she went I went, if possible. I was then strong and hale and hearty, and my duty and my pleasure filled up my time. It was my great joy to see my beautiful wife admired and spoken well of. Perhaps I am selfish; but since I've been an invalid I have seen but little of my wife. She thinks me querulous and exacting. I don't want to interfere with her pleasures and plans, but it does seem hard. I've sometimes asked myself if she has any real love for me, or whether she is not simply a hard and selfish woman, sacrificing all to the pleasures of the life she lives in society.

"I know nothing of her religion. I have had first-rate men in my regiment who were Catholics — but of the religion I know nothing. Do you think God will accept a poor fellow like me? I have never been a religious man, and scarcely said a prayer in my life; but I've tried to do my duty to my fellow

man. I hope no one will be able to stand up and say I've injured them willingly. At school I had no religious teaching. The grim black tablets on which were written the Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, were my idea of Christianity. I never troubled myself, and was never troubled, about religion. I'm getting weaker, I know, and nearer my end. I often ask myself, 'If God is a God of Love, will He receive me? Shall I live again in some other world, or come back here for another chance? For I've never thought of Him or loved Him here in this life; and but for you I should have passed away, lonely.'

He then gave me a brief history of his life.

When I opened to him the beauty of the Catholic Faith and the love of God for His creatures, and the easy and sweet service of a good Catholic, he exclaimed "O my poor wife; how cruel you've been to me! Had I but known all this, how sweet and beautiful our lives would have been. Oh, what have you robbed me of?"

I explained to him that it was not too late, and that God would accept the cheerful offering of what he had left him in life.

I found the General a willing neophyte, and the exposition of the Catholic Faith was a real revelation to his honest and truth-seeking soul. In a short time, after reading when alone, and explanations from me when I visited him, he expressed his desire to be received into the Church.

During my many visits I had not once come across his wife.

I was with the good General one day when Mrs. Larch knocked, opened the door and entered. I shall never forget the look she gave me.

"You here!" she said. Then she said, with a smile, "Will you please see me before you go?" After a few commonplace remarks she left.

"Well, Father Cuthbert," said the General, "I'm afraid there'll be a scene, but I know you don't mind. Patience! — come to-morrow, and if you can, make a Catholic of me at once."

I left him and saw his wife. There was a scene: at least there might have been had I not taken all things very quietly. I let the good lady — she was very beautiful in her high dudgeon and indignation, and posed after the fashion of Mrs. Siddons in the character of Lady Macbeth — exhaust her wrath, and then simply said, "My good child, you are a Catholic and ought to rejoice that your good and most devoted husband has so kindly received a Catholic priest. This world passes away, but the truth remains for ever. There is no need to discuss this matter. I am coming to see the General when and as often as he wishes, so you may rest quite contented with the arrangement. I shall be here again to-morrow. Do not oppose the will of God. You and your husband have to give a separate account of your individual souls." With that I left.

Soon after the interview with Mrs. Larch she left home for Paris. Her husband was now a Catholic, happy and full of gratitude for the great gift which came to brighten the last days of his life. The only shadow which passed was the worldliness of his beautiful wife. But he prayed and hoped for more love and sympathy from a heart he loved so well.

I was called one evening somewhat unseasonably to see the General. He had suddenly taken a most unexpected turn for the worse. "I can't understand it," said the Doctor to me. "He ought to have lived for years, yet somehow there is such a change that I should not be surprised if he passes away to-night." I saw the General. He religiously and devoutly prepared for his passing hence. I

telegraphed to his wife to return from Paris without delay. That night the brave, noble-hearted, childlike man, with a bright smile of happiness, passed into the beautiful home of the kind and indulgent Father, who waits so patiently for the coming of His prodigal children.

My telegram never reached the General's wife.

A grand sensation had been prepared for the gay world of the gay city. A great actress was to appear in a great part in a great play written by a great author. All the world of fashion and society flocked to the Grand Avenue Theatre. Roses and flowers, music and song; brightness and merriment. The gay world was indeed happy: enjoyment was at its height. Then came a cruel cry of fire — the shrieks of thousands — the fury of a panic — frail forms struggling for life — a few brief minutes, and the record of a dire disaster.

Among the ruins of that scene of frivolity and gaiety they found the calcined remains of the beautiful English woman, identified only by the rich and rare gems she had worn that night.

That same night when I stood by the dying man he said to me, "Here, Father Cuthbert, is my war medal: take it and remember me. My wife will not, I trust, forget her duty to the Church and the poor. Tell her how happy I am, and how I thank God that I have come at last to the knowledge of the Truth, and die a child of the Holy Catholic Church."

I could not help thinking, afterwards, what an opportunity for good and what an influence for the Catholic Faith had been lost by that Catholic woman. Worldliness had narrowed her mind, and had frozen the well-springs of her heart.

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