

Wayside Tales No. 4

By Lady Herbert

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The Two Sisters

I was coming out of church one morning, when I was stopped by one of the nicest women in our congregation — a poor woman living by the labour of her hands, but incessantly employed in works of charity and kindness: so that her name has become a household word in the courts and alleys of that miserable district, and her gentle step and soft hand may be found early and late by every sick bed.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "there's a young girl very ill in Crown Street, if you had time to go and see her. The doctor thinks she can't get over it, and she's of the better class, and would be so pleased if you would come and speak to her for a few minutes."

I gladly assented, and followed my kind-hearted guide, whose name was Ellen Blake, down a narrow street to the left of the church, till she stopped at a door of one of the lodgings, and went in. I followed her into a poor little room on the ground-floor, shabbily furnished, where, on a bed as clean as the circumstances would allow, lay the sick girl in question. Her hectic cheek and labouring breath showed me that Ellen's statement was not exaggerated; but the poor child seemed even more troubled in mind than in body. After a time I learned her whole history, and it is this sad tale that I am about to relate to you.

She was the daughter of a poor country clergyman, who died when she and her sister were very young, leaving them utterly dependent on the exertions of their widowed mother. This struggling, miserable existence went on till the girl was between sixteen and seventeen, when the poor mother, fairly worn out with sorrow and privations, followed her husband to the grave. "What was to become of the girls?" was the question which passed from mouth to mouth. The rector of the parish where they lived, and one or two old friends of their father, took the sorrowing orphans by the hands, and invited them to stay first in one house and then in another.

But that could not go on for ever. Luckily, or as it afterwards turned out, unluckily for her, the eldest girl, Mabel, had received a very good education from her poor mother; so that she obtained a governess's situation without much difficulty. But the youngest, Nellie, had been delicate and unable to learn much; and although her pride rather revolted from the idea, the only thing that could be found for her was an apprenticeship in what is called the "mantle" department of a large and fashionable linen-draper's shop, the premium for which was raised by subscription among their friends. Little did those kind and well-meaning people guess the nature of the place or the character of the persons to whom they had entrusted the poor weak child! Everything appeared perfectly well ordered in this vast establishment. The lodging of the "young ladies" was airy and good; the food was plentiful and unexceptionable; the senior partner in the firm stood high in reputation among his townsfolk; and Nellie was congratulated on having fallen into such good hands. There was no one to tell of the late hours during which the shop was kept open; of the night walks which the poor

girls, fainting for a little fresh air after the close hot air of the work-room or show-room, regularly took, first alone, then in company with one or other of the "young gentlemen" of the establishment. Still less was there any suspicion of the nature of the conversation which now fell for the first time upon poor Nellie's ears. At first she was horrified and disgusted, and used to make excuses to remain at home or in her own room, when the labours of the day were over. But then she began to find it dull; and the hot weather came, and she could never get cool in the house; and by degrees the bad, coarse language and the viler jokes ceased to shock her. The temptation to drink likewise came upon her, partly from her delicate health, partly from the inducements held out to her by her companions; for she was very pretty and a general favourite.

But why prolong this part of the story? — the end, alas! but too common — I might almost say inevitable without the grace of God. There was no one to speak a warning word. Nellie was, in fact, the only pure, good girl in the whole house, when she first arrived. But she was weak, and had no deep religious principles to fall back upon; and so she fell, not at once, but bit by bit, and little by little, till she lost that which a lifetime of penitence can never restore, and became a child of sin and shame.

Three or four years passed; the life she was leading told rapidly on a constitution originally delicate, and the summer of 1868 found her in a hospital. She had fallen sick in a low lodging-house in the town where she was then staying, and a good Samaritan, finding how ill she was, got her an admission into the infirmary. This was the beginning of her conversion. In the bed next to her was a young Catholic girl in the last stage of decline. Nellie had been both touched and edified at her patience and unselfishness during the restless nights and days, when Nellie herself, with far less alarming and painful symptoms, could not resist expressing aloud her murmurs and complaints. From admiring her, she got to watch her as she lay, smothering her racking cough not to disturb the ward, and always answering with a pleasant smile the inquiries of the nurse or the doctors as to how she was.

Nellie observed that whenever she suffered more than usual, she used to clasp something very tight in her hand and press it to her breast, and one day she asked her what it was. The dying girl hesitated for a moment, but then, seeing that no one else was listening, said: "It is a crucifix; and it helps me to bear it all, you know," she added earnestly. Nellie's curiosity was roused; she entered into conversation with her, and by degrees the whole truth and beauty of the Catholic faith dawned upon this erring soul; and with that new light came an abhorrence of her own sinfulness, which brought her to the very verge of despair.

The remaining days of her suffering companion's life were spent, as far as her weakness would allow, in teaching and striving to reclaim and console the poor child who had wandered so far from the fold. But they were obliged to be cautious in their talk, as the nurse was a strong Protestant, and took a dislike to the dying girl as soon as she found out that she was a Catholic; and still more when she refused the services of the Protestant minister, who was a weekly visitor at the hospital. Her earnest entreaty to be allowed to see a Catholic priest was harshly refused by the Board of Directors, one fat tallow-chandler in particular, who was a constant attendant at the weekly meetings, declaring that Parson Lane was "good enough for the likes of her," and that "he wasn't going to allow a sneaking Papist to make his way into the wards as long as he sat at that Board." One mild-looking country gentleman ventured to remark that it seemed hard on the poor girl to deprive her of the consolations of her own faith when she was dying; but his mouth was closed by remarks on its being a "precedent," "the thin end of the wedge," and the like — coupled with hints

as to the whole Protestant character of the institution being jeopardized by such an innovation: so the timid gentleman's suggestion was dropped.

So the poor Catholic girl died without the Sacraments; but before her death she made Nellie promise that, as soon as she could leave the house, she would lose no time in calling on Father Penrose, the good old priest who lived in the town where they were. Poor Nellie tearfully treasured up his address as her one anchor of hope and consolation; and when the loving voice which had dictated it to her was mute, and she was left doubly alone in that crowded ward. By degrees her strength returned, and the wished-for day arrived when she could ask for and obtain her discharge. No sooner had she left the hospital, than she hurried to seek the priest's house. He was at home, and received her with fatherly kindness; so that she summoned courage at last to tell him the whole of her miserable history.

Father Penrose placed her for a time with a respectable widow woman living near his chapel, where she was regularly instructed in the Catholic faith, and finally received into the Church. Employment was found for her in a "ready-made" warehouse near, and for almost a twelvemonth Nellie went on admirably, punctual in the performance of her religious duties and apparently a thorough penitent. But then, little by little, she began to relax in her watchfulness, to make imprudent acquaintances, despite the warning words of her only true friends, and to indulge once more in that which habit had made almost a necessity to her — the drinking a glass of wine or spirits before going to work. It was "for her health," she said — she felt "so sinking."

Presently the good priest missed her from her place at Mass, then from the confessional. He went to her and reasoned with her; first gently, then sternly: it was all of no use. She had made great friends with a man younger than herself, and of loose and dissolute habits. The widow with whom she lodged, knowing his character, refused permission for him to come to see Nellie at her house. In a fit of wilfulness she left the home where she had been so kindly sheltered and the woman who had been to her as a mother, saying she could get a room cheaper elsewhere. But this excuse could not blind the eyes of those who really cared for her, and Father Penrose had the sorrow of seeing her plunge deeper and deeper into habits of drinking and dissipation, till "the last state of that soul was worse than the first." Yes, worse — for before she had sinned in comparative ignorance; but now she was sinning against sacramental grace.

Unable, however, altogether to stifle the whisperings of conscience, and fearful of coming across the friends whom she had so cruelly disappointed, Nellie took a sudden resolution to follow her lover to London. Here he deserted her, and she sunk lower and lower, till it was almost impossible to recognize in the ragged, bloodshot-eyed woman, always hanging round the gin-shop door, the fair and gentle Nellie of the year before.

But God, in His mercy, did not abandon the hapless child. He sent her another fit of sickness, so severe that her life was despaired of; and then the whole of her past wickedness rose up before her, and the unheeded lessons of the good old priest came back upon her with agonizing force, and she could only bury her head in her hands, crying out — "Too late — too late!" It was in this state that Ellen Blake found her, and at once devoted her whole mind and energy to strive to save the wretched soul which was hovering on the brink of eternity.

At first her words seemed to fall on barren ground. Nellie would not hear of seeing a priest, or making her confession, or taking any steps to undo the past, or cleanse her soul from its frightful stains. But Ellen was used to cases like hers, and never lost either courage or patience; and at last

her charity was rewarded by Nellie's consenting to speak to the Father who had the care of the Mission in the Westminster district, where she lodged. When I first saw her, she had been for nearly a month under his tender and skilful hand, and the change in her, Ellen said, was marvellous. The most hopeful sign in her penitence was her excessive mistrust of herself. She attributed her last grievous fall and relapse into sin entirely to pride, and now her only anxiety, if she recovered, was to get into the "Good Shepherd," where she would be saved from herself.

"For, you see, I am so miserably weak," she went on repeating, "I cannot answer for myself for a single day if I get better; my passion for drink is stronger than all my good resolutions; for, now that I have got such a habit of it, it is positive agony to me to go without. Do help me, dear madam," she continued, "to get into one of those homes, when I am well enough to leave these lodgings."

I promised all she asked if she would but be still and quiet now; although in my heart I doubted if she would ever rise from her sick bed. One day she began speaking to me of her family, and of her early home, and I suddenly asked her:

"What has become of the sister Mabel you mentioned when you first told me your sad history?"

A sudden flush came over her poor pale face, and she turned it away from me to the other side of the bed.

"That is one of her great troubles now, ma'am," whispered Ellen Blake to me, who was preparing some soup for the invalid, which she had warmed in a little saucepan on the fire. "Perhaps she'll tell you all about it when I am gone."

So saying, she poured out the broth into a cup, asking me to give it to Nellie, and then, with the delicacy of feeling which was habitual to her, quietly left the room. After the door closed there was complete silence for a few moments, only broken at last by a violent sobbing from poor Nellie. I tried to soothe her, and make her take her broth; but at last her sorrow found vent in words:

"You ask me about Mabel, my darling, my beautiful Mabel!" she exclaimed. "How can I tell you how she has been wronged? But perhaps you may have it in your power to help and to save her, so I will let you know all, though I cannot bear to speak of it. I told you that we had an elder sister, did I not, who was well married and gone to Australia? and, when the wreck of our life came, and our mother died, some of our friends very much wished us to go out to her. But to begin with, we did not like being dependent on her and her husband, and then we both had a horror of the sea. Mabel said she should die before she got to Melbourne; so, as she was very clever, and very accomplished, they decided to look out for a governess's situation for her, which was not hard to find.

"She went to a first-rate place in the shire, where she was to have the charge of one little girl, and get eighty pounds a year.

"Oh, how well I recollect that evening before she left! We had never been separated in our lives, and I loved her with a passionate and admiring love, such as a poor weak thing like me generally feels for something far above one in talent, and beauty, and everything else. We had always shared the same room, and all that night whilst she slept I lay by her side watching her, and smothering my sobs that I might not disturb her. She did her best to comfort me, poor Mabel! and we made all kinds of castles in the air — how she would soon save a fortune, and we would live together and be so happy. Little did either of us then foresee what the future had in store for us!

"Well, Mabel went, and for the first month or two her letters were just like herself — warm-hearted and natural — telling us all about her troubles and her pleasures, and her little difficulties with her pupil, etc.; but, on the whole, she seemed happy. Then I went to that horrid warehouse, and by degrees her letters got fewer and fewer, and I got more and more anxious. This was before I had gone wrong myself, and I used to drench my pillow with tears every night thinking of her, and fancying she had ceased to care about me.

"At last I wrote to our old friends at Coventry, and asked them if they had heard of her, or from her; but they knew as little as I did. So months passed away; and one day — I shall never forget it — a large letter was brought to me directed in a strange handwriting. I opened it with a kind of presentiment that it contained bad news... Half an hour after one of my companions found me senseless on the floor with the letter crushed in my hand. After that I became reckless, and did not care what became of me — and you know the rest."

"But what was there in the letter?" I asked.

"Oh, I forgot I had not told you," replied poor Nellie. "But I cannot talk of it — here it is — you may read it for yourself."

I took the soiled and faded lines, which she gave me from under her pillow, and read as follows:

"Mr. Donohue returns Miss Lawrence's letters, as her unworthy sister left his house last week in company with his eldest son and has not been heard of since."

"And have you no clue to her whereabouts?" was my next question to poor Nellie.

"Yes," she replied, "one of my objects in coming to London was to find her out; for, bad as I was, I could not bear to think of her being like myself; and, during the few months of my penitence, my whole life was spent in praying for her. I thought, when I arrived in town, I should have no difficulty in tracing her, little guessing the size of the place and how impossible it would be to discover her except by chance. That chance, however, strange to say, came about.

"I was walking one day in the Park with the man who had persuaded me to leave Coventry, when an accident happened to one of the ladies who was riding in Rotten Row. Every one crowded to see what was the matter, and I somehow got wedged in against the policeman came to move us away. The young lady who had been thrown was lying almost unconscious on the lap of another — and that other was my Mabel! A thousand different thoughts rushed through my head in one moment; but my first instinct was to remain hidden. When I saw that the lady was recovering I stepped back, and, mingling with the crowd, asked the groom, who was holding what I found was Mabel's horse, who the lady was and where she lived. He told me at once; and here it is," continued Nellie, giving me a dirty piece of paper with the address. "Many a time afterwards I have gone to the corner of the street to see her go out, and watch her mount her horse, and, God forgive me! I have sometimes in my misery envied her position and her beautiful clothes. But I never dared speak to her, and now all things appear so differently to me, and it breaks my heart to think of her going to perdition like that! For the love of God, go to her and try and save her!"

"But on what possible ground can I go?" I replied. "How can I intrude myself into her house uninvited and unknown?"

"Tell her you come from me, and that I am dying," feebly answered Nellie, whom this agitation had completely prostrated; and fearful of prolonging a conversation which, in her weak state, might have serious consequences, I promised to see what I could do, and left her in Ellen's care.

All that day and night I kept thinking of poor Nellie's words: "For the love of God, go to her and try and save her." But how? After turning over every possible and impossible plan in my head, I finally resolved to do the simplest thing—which was to go and call upon her, and see what effect the mention of her sister would have upon her. I was not very hopeful of success; nor, I am ashamed to own, did I at all like the errand; but I could not break my word to Nellie, and a something which I cannot describe urged me on.

The house was easily found: it was in a retired part of Brompton. I knocked, asked for "Miss Lawrence," and was shown into a room exquisitely furnished—everything being sky-blue—blue silk covered the sofa and chairs, all the ornaments were of priceless blue Sèvres. Hot-house flowers, jardinières, and every invention of modern luxury were crowded into this little boudoir. I had plenty of time to examine all this, as Miss Lawrence was "dressing," although it was past twelve o'clock. In one corner of the room was a piano: on the desk, to my surprise, I saw the "Hymns Ancient and Modern;" and the book was open at St. Bernard's beautiful hymn, "Jesus, the very thought of Thee," etc. Here was a glimmer of hope, and I thanked God in my heart for the opening it gave me.

After a few minutes more Miss Lawrence came in. She was dressed with perfect taste, and was very beautiful, although her colour was heightened by paint, and her hair was dyed the fashionable gold colour. She asked me my errand with a certain embarrassment mingled with pride, and I felt that my best chance of making an impression was to tell her at once, and without preparation, of her sister's condition. The effect was what I anticipated; she burst into tears, and implored me to tell her where she was. This Nellie had specially begged me not to do, so that I was obliged to put her off with some kind of excuse. After a time she got calmer; and then, something being said about Nellie's sweet voice in old times, I pointed to the piano, and asked her if she sang that hymn. She coloured, but said "Yes," and that she was very fond of it. Then I asked her if she ever went to church. At this her whole manner changed in an instant.

"To church!" she exclaimed, "living the life I do? Do you think I would mock God like that?"

These words gave me fresh hope—at least she had a sense of sin, and felt that she was outraging the God of purity. But I said no more that day, only promising to return very soon and let her know the state her sister was in. She thanked me warmly, and I felt that the first step was gained.

The following day, and the next, I called again with bulletins of Nellie, who was slowly recovering; but, though her sister was evidently pleased to see me, I could not feel that much progress was being made in the one thing which was the object of our hopes and prayers. Various circumstances prevented my returning to Brompton that week, and I was startled and surprised on Sunday evening by a note being brought me marked "immediate" from Miss Lawrence, imploring me to go and see her the following morning as early as I could. I went and found her in a strange state of agitation. In answer to my inquiries, she told me that a great friend of hers had died suddenly the day before in the midst of a thunderstorm, and that it had frightened her very much; for, though a Scripture reader had come and assured her she would be saved, it had not satisfied her. "For she has been living the same life as I," she exclaimed, "and had no time to repent; and if she's all right, why, the Bible must be a lie!"

With this opening I had no difficulty in telling her all that was in my heart, and I found her a willing and even an eager listener. I represented to her in strong colours the fearful future which was before her, and how when she was no longer pretty, or young, or attractive, she would be cast aside as an old glove. I told her the whole story of her sister's sin and hearty penitence, and of her earnest prayers for her, and wound up by imploring her to see a priest, promising to bring a very old friend of mine the next day who would not frighten her, but be as gentle with her as a brother.

At first she would not hear of it; became almost violent, and declared that, if any one of that sort came into the house, she would go out of it; but, after a time, she got reconciled to the idea; allowed that she had been several times to listen to the music at the Oratory, and had longed once to open her heart to one of the Fathers whom she had seen there, but did not dare. Her terror was lest he should force her into a penitentiary; but of that I told her there was no fear whatever.

The next morning I brought my old friend. I saw she "took to him," as the saying is, at once; and so, after a little general conversation, I slipped away into her bedroom, leaving him to talk to this poor soul alone, while I prayed for her with all my heart.

After about half an hour I returned: her whole expression seemed changed. She said: "Father — has been trying to persuade me to leave this house and stay with some friends of his, and do you know I am more than half inclined to go?"

I took her hand and said I hoped and trusted she would; and then wished her good-bye, more hopeful about her than I had ever been.

Still the devil did not let go his prey without a terrible struggle. The next day she received, whilst I was there, the most beautiful presents in jewellery, together with a case of champagne. After a great deal of discussion, I persuaded her to send them all back. It cost her a great deal, but she did it. Then she received the most moving letters from her tempter, imploring her not to leave him, and promising anything she wished if she would only remain where she was. All this was very hard to flesh and blood. But she was a girl of resolute will, and when once she made up her mind to do anything, she resolved to keep to it. This Nellie had told me before, and added that her greatest hopes rested on this firmness of character in her sister.

At last the day arrived when she was to leave her luxurious home. We had had great difficulty in finding any religious house not strictly for penitents which would receive her, as they all declined when they heard her history. At last the Superior of a convent in the neighbourhood of London consented to give her a room which she generally kept for a retreatant, and to receive her into their house, on condition that she never revealed her sad secret to any one of its inmates. Having arranged this, I went to fetch her one evening about five o'clock, according to agreement. At the door I found her saddle-horses waiting. Feeling that the moment was a decisive one, and probably the only hope of this poor girl's salvation, I went to the groom, and, telling him his mistress would not want to ride that afternoon, dismissed him and went into the house. She cried violently when she saw me; but at last consented to let me pack up for her the few simple things she wanted, leaving the rest to be sent later, and finally to accompany me to the carriage which was waiting at the corner of the street. It was impossible not to feel for the poor child, who at that moment was forsaking a life of unmixed indulgence, where everything pandered to her tastes and pleasures, for one of hardship and poverty and penitence, alone with God, whom as yet she could scarcely be said to know! But His grace had touched her heart; and, after a very short hesitation, she walked steadily from the door.

We arrived at the convent towards the evening. She was perfectly silent from exhaustion and fright; but we were shown into the parlour by a kind-looking portress, who at once brought her a cup of tea, and told her the Mother would be with her in a few moments. The cheerful look of the house, and the gentle, nice face of the lay sister, reassured poor Mabel, who sat with her hand in mine, scarcely realizing as yet the full bearing of the step she had so generously taken. Very soon the Superior came in, and she won Mabel's heart at once, as I had foreseen. Then turning to me, she said:

"You may leave her, dear madam, quite comfortably with us; and I hope you will come and see her to-morrow, and that you will find her well, and calmer."

Giving her a warm kiss, which the poor child convulsively returned, I rose and left her. The next day the Superior told me she had had a violent fit of crying after I left; but that then she had begged to go to the chapel, and remained there till night prayers, when she of her own accord knelt at the Mother's feet and asked for her blessing. I found her calmer than I expected, but very much depressed, and we at once entered into conversation about the future. She said her first anxiety was to be instructed in the Catholic faith, and to see again the kind priest whom I had brought to her house. In concert with the Mother Superior a regular course of instruction was arranged for her so as to occupy her mind; and she likewise asked, and obtained, permission to look after and teach a little orphan child who was in the house, to fill up the hours which otherwise would have hung heavily on her hands — for my greatest fear for her was the reaction consequent on the excitement of the last few weeks, and especially from the absence of the stimulants to which she had been so long accustomed. She soon became so engrossed in the great work of preparing worthily to receive the Sacraments of Penance, Baptism, and Confirmation, that the past seemed for a time forgotten, or only remembered with an agony of compunction and remorse. Especially was this the case when preparing for her first general confession, and when the whole magnitude of her sin, and of the frightful danger from which God had rescued her, was by degrees revealed to her. Fortunately she had fallen into the hands of one who knew how to bind up the broken-hearted and penitent soul, or her despair would have induced her to do something wild and desperate. Finally, on the Feast of the Assumption, I had the joy of seeing her receive her First Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation from the hands of our venerable Archbishop.

Poor Nellie had already entered with a thankful heart into a house of the Good Shepherd; and she wrote to Mabel a letter in which a touching joy and gratitude to God were mingled. Mabel herself had but one idea; that of reparation to the Sacred Heart which she had so grievously wounded. She had taken the name of Magdalen at her baptism, and obtained without much difficulty an engagement as English teacher in a foreign convent.

In the meantime her sister, who was in Australia, wrote to entreat her to come to Melbourne. By the help of some kind friends a passage was secured for her and she was placed under the escort of a respectable married couple, who were about to join their children in the colony. So one fine summer's morning the vessel glided out of the docks, and Mabel started to begin a new and a better life in a fresh country.

The Story of a Conversion

I had just settled down one morning to my usual writing-table, with a heap of unanswered letters on one side and of uncorrected proofs on the other, and was hoping to have a quiet and undisturbed hour or two for both duties, when the door opened, and my old servant's head appeared, though with some hesitation, as he knew I was very busy.

"If you please, my lady," he began, and then stopped, looking compassionately at the heap of work before me.

"Well, James," I said resignedly, "who is wanting to see me this terribly wet day? I thought I should have been free from visitors in such a downpour as this!"

"It is a young woman, my lady. Very well-mannered and respectable; a servant, I think, who seems very anxious to speak to you, and says you knew her in your old home."

"Show her up," was my reply.

In a few seconds the door opened to admit a pleasant-looking girl of twenty-six or twenty-seven, whom, however, I failed to recognize.

"Don't you know me, my lady?" she asked, when I had begged her to be seated. "I am Mary Dawn, the baker's daughter at Warton."

"What am I to do," I replied, laughing, "when all you children grow so quickly into men and women, and make me feel even more of a grandmother than I am already? Yes; I see now it is you by your eyes. But what can I do for you? I hope you are not in any trouble?"

"No, my lady," replied Mary, colouring; "at least, not exactly. And yet I am in great trouble," she added, after a moment's pause; "and you are the only person in the world that can help me, I think, if I may tell you about it."

"Tell me everything," I replied; and making her sit down, I prepared to listen.

"Well, my lady," continued Mary, "you know that you advertised for me some two years ago, and got me a very nice place as lady's-maid to Mrs. Lancaster. She was a good kind lady, and I was very comfortable there, and worked for her and the young ladies, and never had a cross word from her till..."

"Till what?" I asked, seeing Mary hesitated.

"Till something happened which I am going to tell you about," she replied. "About a month ago my mistress had gone out of town for the Sunday, and was not to return till late at night. It had been very hot all day, and as I had not my lady to dress I thought I would take a walk in the cool of the evening. In passing by Brompton I heard some beautiful singing in a large church near the road, and saw a lot of people going in. Curiosity prompted me to follow them, and I found myself in a large, long building, crowded to excess, the men being on one side and the women on the other. There was a great deal of light and flowers at the further end; and I stood there, wondering what on earth was going to happen. At last a kind of procession of clergymen came out at a side-door, one of whom was beautifully dressed, and they knelt in a wide space, which was railed off before the communion-table, which, as I said before, was all covered with lights.

"What are they going to do?" I whispered to a woman near me.

"Hush!" she replied; 'don't you see? There's going to be Benediction.'

"What she meant by that I couldn't imagine. But all of a sudden, as I was watching, I saw one of the clergymen put something round his neck, and then go up to a kind of large square box which was on the table and open the door with a key. Then he seemed to take something out, and he knelt, and then put it in a beautiful gold thing looking like a watch-case; and then he went and carried it somewhere behind the table; and, I suppose, up some steps, for suddenly I saw it, high above all the rest, on a sort of throne; and some one gave a pull to my gown, and I looked round for a moment and saw that it was to make me kneel, as every one else was on their knees. And so I did. But when I looked again up at the throne — oh! I shall never forget it — no never!"

"What did you see, Mary?" I exclaimed.

"I saw Jesus Christ in His glory," replied Mary, reverently; "I could not distinguish the watch-case any longer, but there was a wonderful light, and in the middle was Our Lord, just as He is represented in the pictures, with pierced hands and feet. And He seemed to be beckoning me to come to Him, and it filled me with such joy and yet such fear too, I don't know what I felt. And I don't know how long He was there. But I know I remained kneeling on ever so long after the people round me went, and at last a clergyman came up to me, and I asked him where I was.

"And he said, 'In the Oratory, my child.' And seeing I didn't understand him, he added, 'In a Catholic church. Were you never in one before?'

"I only said, 'No, never, sir.' But I was afraid to say more, and went away.

"But all that evening and all that night I thought of nothing else. I felt just as Samuel must have felt when God called him. And of one thing I was very sure — that I must become a Catholic, and go again to that church. After a day or two my mistress remarked that something was the matter with me, and asked me if I was ill. I said 'No,' and tried to go about as usual; but I could not rest.

Whenever I knelt down to say my prayers, especially, I used to see that vision of Our Lord more plainly, and He seemed to be reproaching me for delay. At last I took courage, and spoke to Mrs. Lancaster. She at first laughed at me, treating the whole thing as a delusion. Then, when she saw I was really in earnest, she became very grave, and said she would speak to her clergyman about it.

"In a day or two I was sent for to go into the drawing-room, and there I found Mrs. Lancaster and the clergyman. Mrs. Lancaster got up and said:

"Mary, this is a very good friend of ours, and I want you to have some talk with him about what you told me the other day.'

"I curtsied and said nothing, and Mrs. Lancaster went away. The clergyman made me sit down, and talked to me for a long time about the sin of joining the Church of Rome, and leaving the Church of my baptism; and I listened to all he had to say, but I felt more strongly than ever that somehow he was wrong. At last he got impatient at my silence, and said:

"Why don't you answer me?'

"I replied, 'Sir, I'm but an ignorant girl, and can't argue with a gentleman like you. But I believe with my whole heart that the Catholic Church is the only true one, for it's the only one where I have seen Our Lord.'

"Who has been putting these thoughts into your head?" he answered angrily. 'You have been tampered with by some Romanist or other.'

'I replied, 'No, sir; I don't know a single Catholic, and have never, that I know of, read a Catholic book.'

"The gentleman looked very uncomfortable when I said this, and got up, saying:

"I will speak to your mistress. You may go.'

"What he said to her I don't know; but in the evening she called me into her room, and said she was very sorry for my obstinacy, but that I must clearly understand that if I persisted in becoming a Romanist I must leave her service.

"I felt ready to break my heart, for I knew I must go. I couldn't disobey Our Lord. So I went to my own room, and had a good cry, and then prayed with all my heart that I might only do what was right. But I thought, if I am sent away, where can I go to? My father would be more angry with me than Mrs. Lancaster; and I had no money and no home. Then all of a sudden I remembered your ladyship had become a Catholic; and though I was but a little child at the time, I recollected all the fuss there had been about it in our village. And so I asked leave this morning to go out and come to you, to ask whether you could advise and help me, and tell me what to do to become a Catholic; for you are the only one I know in the world."

I need not say with what a joyful, thankful heart I heard this poor child's simple story. I settled at once that she was to come to me when she left Mrs. Lancaster, and then placed her with a great friend of mine, who devotes her whole life to preparing souls for the great grace of entering into the true fold. Soon after she was received into the Church. I got her a nice place in an old Catholic family, as she said truly that she could not go home; and then I lost sight of her for a year or two, till she was recalled to my memory by the following letter, which I will transcribe literally.

"DEAR AND HONOURED LADY,

"I hope you will forgive my taking the liberty of writing to you, as you begged me to let you know if any change came to me. Last year poor father was taken very ill, and he got worse and worse, and my brother said he was always looking round as if he wanted somebody. And at last Henry (that's my brother) said to him, 'Father, do you want Mary?' 'Yes, I do,' he answered. Now, you know, my lady, ever since I came into the Church he has never seen me or written to me, or let my name be mentioned in the house, which vexed Henry very much, for he and I were very fond of one another. Henry didn't lose a moment, but ran off to the office and sent a telegram to me to come down. And my mistress gave me leave directly, and said, 'Who knows Mary? you may perhaps get the grace for your father too.' Well, I got home that evening, and as soon as ever I came into the room, father opened his eyes, and called feebly, 'Mary!' I flew up to the bed and threw my arms round his neck and kissed him, but couldn't help crying to see how he was changed. After a minute or two he said, 'Mary, my lass, I've been hard upon you. Can you forgive me?' I could only answer by my sobs; but from that time he never could bear me out of his sight. And one day he began to talk to me about religion, and asked me what made me change. And I told him, and we talked for a long time. And, at last he said, 'Do you think the priest would come and see me?' I could scarcely speak for joy. But I sent off for Father Penrose, and he came by the train even sooner than I dared hope. And, to make a long story short, my lady, father was received, and had all the last Sacraments before he died,

which he did, so happily, two days later. So your words have come true, my lady, and I have been rewarded even in this life for the step I took in such anxiety and fear."

I need add little more to this touching story. Mary went back to her mistress, and a short time after married an excellent young Catholic carpenter, who had been attached to her for a long time.

I have written this account of her conversion to encourage the many halting, fearful souls who are longing to follow Mary's example, yet hesitate for fear of losing their places, or being turned out of their homes to face life alone. To all such I would say: Trust in God, who will never permit a generous sacrifice to remain unrewarded. Go forward simply and fearlessly, following the inspirations of His Holy Spirit. Even if the path be full of sorrows, and the future uncertain and dark, yet the peace which passeth all understanding will fill your hearts, and in God's own time and way all earthly consolations will be granted to you.
