

# The Storyteller.

## THE DELINQUENT.

(By DOROTHY GRESHAM in *Catholic World*.)

One day, after a heated discussion, as he rose to go his antagonist said calmly: "Perhaps you would not be so severe and unjust towards the Catholic Church if you knew somewhat of her doctrines and teachings. Will you let me give you some of our books, and see for yourself? They cannot do you any harm, and they may teach you more toleration and—charity."

He looked disgusted at first; then, seeing how hurt and sad she looked, said for politeness' sake, "Well, if you wish it, I will look at them."

She handed him the "Imitation" saying earnestly: "Everything I love and want is there."

He left, and for weeks they saw none of him. At last he came one morning and asked if he might keep that little book some time; it required thought and study. The request was willingly given, and as the rector was leaving he said hurriedly: "You have nothing else you would like me to read, have you?"

"Yes," she answered, giving him the only two books she had besides the "Imitation"—"Christian Perfection" and "The Catholic Christian Instructed."

Nothing more was said on the matter, though he came and went, flinging a stone at Rome when he got the chance, and she was always ready with a Roland for his Oliver. When he met her occasionally at entertainments through the winter there was no disguise about his repulsion for her. It always amused her, and, as their mutual friends sympathised with the rector though they loved her, their little battles were well known across the Point and over the bay.

As the ice broke, and the first breath of spring came over the water, a great change was gradually noticed in the rector's bearing towards the Delinquent. He was constantly at the old house; all his former harshness had disappeared; she was the last to notice it, as his peculiarities had grown so familiar, but people said he had given up all hope of converting her. It was just as well, they thought; she was a Catholic now, alas! and she was the one to suffer; and—well, let it be; there was no accounting for tastes!

So peace was proclaimed, and things dropped into the normal ways, and the old life by the lake was cloudless and happy. The Delinquent, coming out of an Irish cottage one wild, stormy day, met the rector on his rounds, and together they started homewards. Through the fury of the blast they battled onward, the waves breaking with merry resounding music against the cliffs. He went along in silence, and then "I was coming to bring you this," showing her a copy of the "Confessions" of St. Augustine: "would you care to see it?—and—and—I have finished the first volume of "Christian Perfection," and would like to read the second." He seemed anxious to be off, and when they reached the old house only waited at the door till she gave him "Rodriguez" and hurried away. It was some time before he called, and then casually asked the Delinquent what she thought of the "Confessions"; she replied by inquiring had he noticed where St. Augustine said that his mother's last request to him was that he should remember her daily in the Holy Sacrifice. What sacrifice did she mean if it were not the Mass? St. Augustine evidently believed in prayers for the dead, which of course he, the rector, did not. "Perhaps I do" was all he said, and the subject was dropped.

Two weeks later a long funeral procession wended down the village street and to the little Episcopal church on the hill. Through the open doors the casket was borne within, where the congregation were gathered for the services for the dead. Never did the rector look more spiritual than on those sad and solemn occasions. To-day he seemed much moved as he spoke of the friend who had left them—brave old Captain Wells, whom every one knew and loved, for miles along the lake. His genial, happy smile, and kindly sunny heart were gone from them; but, the young preacher urged, "we must not forget the dead, they like to be remembered; and alas! how few of us ever think of them, once the sods are laid over them and we turn away from the church-yard. St. Augustine tells us, as he stood at the bedside of his dying mother, St. Monica, she asked him not to forget her, and to-day I ask you to remember the dead." Listening sadly to his words, seated with her mother, who had come to see the last of their old friend, the Delinquent was startled at the St. Augustine allusion, and was eagerly waiting for the rest, when the rector stopped, and the procession slowly left the church. The congregation remained seated as the coffin was borne away, she alone kneeling, of all who were there, to pray for the poor soul. Behind the casket the rector followed reverently; as he passed his eyes fell on the solitary kneeling figure, and her expression told him too well what she was doing. He was startled—stung—perplexed. "Remember me daily at the Holy Sacrifice"; surely St. Augustine was one of theirs; and yet—and yet—

The following afternoon found him in the drawing-room of the old house, anxious and weary, but with his usual quiet smile. They talked of the funeral yesterday, of the loyal old man whom they knew so well, of the changes his death might mean to the place and people, and then in a sudden pause he said, "How did you ever become a Catholic?" The Delinquent looked at him in amazement, so abrupt, so strange his question, and then answered very earnestly, "The goodness of Almighty God, and the beautiful examples of saintly lives I saw in that Faith."

"What do you mean? There are no Catholics here that would likely influence you, I am sure."

"Yes, even here, if you knew them; see the fidelity of those poor Irish, their patience under every trial, their brightness, their joy, even in every privation; but it was not to those I allude particularly. You may remember seeing how happy I was last

summer, when the new York cousins were here. You refused to come near us then, and our amusements were so delightful, so child-like in one way, and always so supremely happy. Last year there was a great blank in our holidays, for one was gone who had cast a sunshine over all our fun; he was only a boy of seventeen, the merriest of the party, the first in everything that was gay and mischievous; his laugh rang over the bay with such a light-hearted, joyous peal that echoed the innocence of his very soul. With all that, he was so unwaveringly, unpretendingly good; never in all our sports and frolic was he known to say a quick, unkind word; every act, and thought even, seemed angelic, and above all a complete unconscious forgetfulness of self. We all loved him, and nothing seemed right without him.

"One evening towards the end of the vacation, at one of our memorable gipsy-teas on one of the islands, wandering away from the others, he told me on his return to New York he intended entering the Jesuit novitiate. At first I could not understand; then slowly it dawned on me that this beautiful life was about to be given up voluntarily, nay joyously, with all its promise, to God. It was a revelation, and only in one Church would such a sacrifice be asked, and still more wonderful, given, and given in such a spirit and from such a soul. I was a Catholic from that moment. In silence we reached the others; I could not speak, so strangely were my thoughts and inclinations warring within me. I said nothing to anyone, but the first letter he received from me at the novitiate began, 'I am a Catholic'—it never struck me as being absurd to write, 'I am'; not, 'I am going to be'; for I was then, and never seemed to have been anything else. In his answer he wrote that on reading my opening line, 'I am a Catholic,' he dropped the letter and went at once to the chapel to thank God for this answer to prayer. He could not tell me how many Masses had been said and prayers offered for my conversion, and yet he had never said one word to me; but as his parting gift left me a little catechism. This was now my sole instructor. I read chapter by chapter slowly and carefully, hunting up the references in my own Protestant Bible; and as I read, my only wonder was why I had not become a Catholic long ago, seeing the truth as it really was. The cook's prayer-book was my only help, and for half a year I waited for permission to be received into the Church. You know what a grief to my mother; she was so good about it, tried to hide her disappointment, but said she could not come between me and God. Father, whom I dreaded most of all, gave his consent very willingly, declaring the Catholic Church had always excited his admiration; that he had seen the extraordinary devotion of her priests during the cholera epidemic in New York, fighting nobly for their people when all the other clergymen fled from the dread disease. And once going down the St. Lawrence he met two young French priests, gay as school-boys, going to some island where small-pox raged, and where even to land seemed certain death. They spoke of it as if it were such a privilege to be sent, when so many others were longing to go. Our Protestant friends were kind, they were more hurt and surprised than angry; indeed it was with one of them I stayed in New England, while under instruction for my reception into the Church."

During this narrative the rector listened attentively, without interruption; then kindly: "You will forgive me for the many unjust speeches I have made to you, my harsh judgments and criticisms. I see now how wrong I have been. I should have sought information first; then weighed the evidence before condemning you without knowledge; my ignorance and misguided zeal are my sole apologies."

"It is strange," he said regretfully, "how we censure the Catholic Church and her doctrines, in perfect ignorance of what we denounce. On any other subject, political, social, even physical, we should not dream of discussing without some previous study, but on such a serious matter as religion we take it for granted that all the blood-curdling tales of our youth must be correct, and we fling charity and truth to the winds, and alas! too often teach those under our charge the same vile scandals and concoctions that have disgraced our childhood. Though," he added, "that is but a sorry excuse; if we were honest men the world of books would enlighten our dulness and bigotry."

The rector left the old house that evening armed and ready for the fight—the most severe and painful for poor human nature—right and wrong, peace and strife, prosperity and adversity.

July, glorious and radiant, brought the merry New York cousins to the village. How lively they made the old house on the hill, the lake, the islands, the woods; how gaily their jokes rang over the water, how infectious their good humour. They timidly asked the rector to join their excursions, and to their surprise he consented. At first he went to show his old prejudice had gone; soon he enjoyed the novelty and the adventures with the rest. He joined in their songs and witticisms and was in return teased, unmercifully teased (they would not spare the whole bench of bishops if they had the chance); the rector gave it back with all his polish and thrust, which won their hearts at once. Returning one evening with them across the bay he told them his favourite sister was about to pay him a visit, and as a matter of course a picnic to one of the islands celebrated her arrival. Never, it seemed, had there been such a day; the accidents more humorous and thrilling than usual; and the sun was preparing for slumber before the party were ready to embark for the main-land. It was one of the loveliest and loneliest spots on the bay, surrounded by hills; the water lay like a valley of mist between the dim outline of great woods; the setting sun transformed it into a superb combination of light and shade. The bay plashed the golden ripples in wanton frolic, protected by the hills which borrowed of the heavens glories to drape their rugged side, while wood and water revelled in flashing sunbeams, and mocked the ever-varying sky by the ethereal beauty of their colouring. Standing apart, the rector looked longingly yet sadly at the beloved scene; a determined yet happy light shone in his eyes, and turning abruptly, he made his way to where the Delinquent was putting the last touches to baskets and boxes before having them carried down to the boats. It was his only chance for what he had to say, and he felt that it must be said to-day. "I

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