

material symbols, was the one thing with which he could find no fault. Perhaps, he mused, it was the leaven of truth in their lump of error which would save their souls at the last—Hannah's soul, at least. Of that he was sure.

Had a bell been tolling for him he was not so confident that Hannah's theology would have been as far-reaching. He and she had never spoken to each other of their religion. The gulf between them was too awful. Deacon Henry—John's nearest neighbor—could have held forth eloquently upon such a point, but his opinions were vitiated by his being a Baptist. So all that Deacon John had hazarded was a word or two with his own wife.

'Think, Mary,' he said one day, after the ministering angel had helped them to look unflinchingly into their first open grave, 'Hannah must believe—if her religion means anything to her, she must believe that Bobbie wasn't—'

'Don't, Don't!' sobbed the mother. And John had gone out to the barn to wrestle alone with the stern facts of the case.

Another time, while they were at Hannah's, offering the first fruits of their strawberry patch, John, in jocular mood, nudged his wife and whispered:

'I suppose she thinks that the priest could make berries like them grow on the table by just waving his hand.'

But now John fingered the crease in a black trouser leg. He wondered what had prompted him to dress thus—since he meant to plough. Was it simply respect? The bell added stroke to stroke, as if to make an anvil of his heart. It seemed to break through his opinions and to beat upon the great fundamental cords. From being terrible it had become inviting—and now it pleaded:

'Come!'

Long, tremulous, like a voice calling in the night, it rang out from the belfry.

And John wanted to yield. That, he finally admitted, was the secret reason for his putting on the black clothes. He had not meant to plough—had only meant to cheat himself up to the last moment. But he would take himself in hand. There was now a great blotch on the steps where the people were packed, waiting until those ahead of them had passed in that slow march through the doors. It was too late for a newcomer to get in. Temptation's opportunity was lost.

So, letting his hypnotized legs carry him, he slipped from the wall and skirted the edge of the crowd. No one seemed to notice him; but his eyes, alert with self-consciousness, soon caught sight of—whom but Deacon Henry, towering on the opposite edge of the blotch. Here was a new problem. Had Deacon John, the oldest officer in the Presbyterian church, a right to tamper with things sacrificed to idols while the oldest officer of the Baptist church was at hand to spy? What an example such backsliding would be to the young people; what an argument in favor of immersion and against sprinkling! And Deacon Henry might exaggerate a glimpse until it appeared as if Deacon John had actually gone into the church. John turned and stalked past on the sidewalk. The heart of the man must not lead the head of the deacon astray.

Yet the heart ached. It was jealous of those who were permitted to mourn. To be shut off now increased the world's new emptiness. Of all that it held, what did he not owe to her? Yet he had never voiced his appreciation. If he could but do something—even now, it was too late. Somehow the dead would see and understand.

He recalled the one occasion upon which he had come nearest acknowledging to the good woman that, in spite of doctrine, she had hit upon the essential things which make for salvation. But her youngest boy had stalked in most inopportunistly.

'James was confirmed to-day,' said the unthinking Hannah.

'She's going to make a priest of him!' flashed through Deacon John's bewildered head, sealing the lips that had been about to extend what he understood to be the limits of the covenant. Of course, Hannah would teach her children to fall down and worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had set up! But at last—so he reasoned—she was where the sound of the sackbut and psaltery could no more confuse her understanding. And he decided that he would go and stand bareheaded before her church—as a monk doing penance; had he but known it.

The deacon walked on around the block, but when the cross once more looked down upon him his feet, instead of standing still, suddenly turned, taking him up the steps, through the crowd—thinned now to a small number, that stood waiting for something—on past the vestibule with the marble fonts, and up the deserted middle aisle.

He had meant to drop inconspicuously into a back seat. But the church did not contain the decent scattering of parishioners he was accustomed to associate with funerals. Not only were the back seats filled, but the whole edifice was tense with the pressure of an astonishing multitude. It crammed every available space and emanated a strange magnetism which affected the imagination like wine. People were everywhere—by the doors, in the gallery, in the choir-loft. They stood along the walls, hiding the Stations of the Cross that John did not know were there. Only that one aisle—and a block of

pews, near the front, cut off from the rest by their sharp emptiness—afforded even a breathing space.

If the truth must be told, he had always regarded this simple Irish woman a shade patronizingly, as if she were his own particular discovery; and he had rather feared a scant testimonial in her behalf. The assemblage, so much larger than the congregations he was used to, moved him with a sense of loss. His private benefactress proved to have been the village saint.

Yet he thanked God that Hannah had not gone unappreciated. Yes, face to face with the trappings of that alien worship—in spite of the strange, white construction that gleamed beyond a railing in front of him; in spite of the candles, which he had expected, and a motionless red light hanging from the ceiling, which was a surprise; in spite of the crowning image of a woman which stood on high to the left—he thanked God.

Deacon John was accustomed to sit well forward in church. The empty pews caught his eye as he moved on, and a boy in a black cassock lifted a wand which had been laid to block the passage. Without realising it, Deacon John was seated in the place reserved for the mourners.

The strangeness of his surroundings had no time to arouse the theological ire before there was a stir, instantly giving place to a yet more graven stillness. Something was being brought up the aisle—something which made the very idea of mummery impossible. No matter what the priests and the congregation might do, it would be converted into solemn symbolism, even for Deacon John, by the calm presence that was soon installed by the altar-rail. A score of men and boys in vestments filed from a panel in the back of the chancel. An unseen choir struck up a solemn chant.

But as the service went on the spell gradually wore thin. Deacon John had almost come to himself, and was beginning to glance around, when the unintelligible Latin was interrupted by a startling English sentence:

'Although it is contrary to our custom on these occasions, I feel bound to say a word or two of my own.'

It was the priest. He had come to the head of the coffin. A group of youths in cassocks stood by him. John scanned the pale face in a vain search for the mark of the beast. Had he been aware, the face was not unlike his own—furrowed with years, yet sweetened with deep experience.

'If I were to preach a funeral sermon,' the priest went on, 'I should take for my subject some such words as might be found in a paraphrase of the thirty-fifth verse of the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew: "I was hungry, and she gave me meat; thirsty, and she gave me drink; sick and in prison, and she visited me." That is what you all are saying to yourselves. Many strangers are here—strangers to the Church she served, yet not strangers to her. I feel that she did not belong altogether to us. We pour our charity into little vessels. She had a charity as wide as life. To visit the fatherless in their affliction, to help the poor, to comfort the bereaved, to lift up the fallen, to pray for the dying—these things, she told me—it was only last Thursday—always seemed to her the essentials of religion. The "worth-while things," she called them. To how many of us has she done the "worth-while things"! I remember—'

What did the old priest remember? It remained unsaid. His voice wavered, and he stood silent. Even Deacon John could not deny the name-holy water to the salt drops that fell on the coffin.

And in the graveyard back of the church it was the same story, told again and again in the hushed groups.

'She came to me when my man took to drink.'

'It was her helped me when I couldn't get a job nowhere.'

'She nursed Willie through the smallpox.'

'I don't see how her children bear their loss. It's lucky for her husband that he died first.'

And there were some strange-eyed girls who did not say anything, but dropped flowers on the grave, went one side, and wept.

Everybody was testifying in some way. Deacon John—who had the most to thank her for—felt that he alone had done nothing, said nothing, showed nothing. He might have been a spy, like Deacon Henry, for all that his stiff-necked presence shadowed forth. What would she like? What could he do to indicate that he was taking some part? How might he appease his own soul-hunger?

The old man stood again in front of the steps. Slowly he made his way to the deserted vestibule. He had seen people dipping their fingers in the fonts and crossing themselves. If he were to touch the holy water, would she understand?

Sweat stood out on his brow as he dragged himself forward. The contents of the marble basin seemed icy cold to his shaking fingers. But he carried the ordeal through. He crossed himself awkwardly, uncanonically. But he had taken part.

Eyes were upon his back. He wheeled around. There stood Deacon Henry.

'I wanted to do something like that myself, but couldn't think of what to do,' said Deacon Henry.

And before Deacon John's amazed eyes the Baptist went forward and repeated the ceremony as if he had