

a gentler tone than usual began to talk of school and the children in general, until Agnes, touched by her unusual kindness, was insensibly led on to tell some of the petty annoyances to which she was almost daily subjected. How Reuben Hodges had gathered round him an admiring circle of listeners during recess and held them spellbound by a thrilling account of a seven-horned beast, with eyes of fire and the tail of a dragon, and carrying a scarlet woman on its back; and that Miss Graham fell down and worshipped it, and had to adore the image of the Virgin, etc., etc., *ad nauseam*. The poor child had evidently been dosed with a distorted mixture of the Apocalypse and one of the many false ideas of devotion to Mary; for be it known, Hiram Hodges pounded on his meat block on week days and on the Methodist pulpit on Sundays, the same force being equally applied. It could be said with all truth that his remarks carried weight if not eloquence.

Mrs. Harrington's pale face flushed as Agnes spoke in defence of her faith, and indignantly refuted the charges brought against her devotion to the Mother of God.

'Of course, I know you are not a Catholic yourself, Mrs. Harrington, and perhaps I have been too outspoken,' she said; 'though it seems strange to hear of one of your name being a Protestant.'

Mrs. Harrington flushed more deeply still, and hastily changed the conversation, though she was ill at ease, and her eyes had a half sad, half defiant expression for the rest of the evening, which did not escape Agnes.

Some days later Father Byrne came, and after confessions were over and the shabby little church made ready for Mass the following day, Agnes told him of the incident, and of the faint suspicion that had been aroused.

'Pray hard, my child,' he said. 'I hope much from your being with poor Mrs. Harrington; for she should indeed be a Catholic, but my predecessor warned me not to speak to her directly on religious matters, so I have prayed long and earnestly that the scales may fall from her eyes, and when I heard of her admitting you into her house to board I hoped great things. Get the Holy Souls to work, and offer up all your little trials and vexations that grace may soften her heart and break down the barriers of pride which have for so many years kept her from God.'

That night Agnes thought long and seriously of Mrs. Harrington, and the next morning gave her a large share in her Communion; but she had to use great tact in her dealings with the poor, proud soul.

November was passing rapidly, and already the air was cold and wintry, with a marked decrease in the attendance at school, especially among the poorer children. Tom Lane's bare brown feet no longer scampered round the yard. 'No book' was the universal reply to the notes of inquiry; and poor Agnes sighed as she thought of her slender purse, and the many little home comforts she had to relinquish in order that Ralph's college course might not be interrupted.

The little Catholic children had already made a novena in honor of the Holy Souls, and great had been the wrath of Hiram Hodges when he learned that 'Papist prayer meetings were held in the schoolhouse after hours.' The pulpit was banged harder than ever that Sunday, and the stories told by the zealous Reuben were more blood-curdling than ever, until some of the smaller children expected to see a cloven foot protrude from the teacher's skirts.

Very little change was noticeable in Mrs. Harrington's household, unless it were that the unhappy, restless look had grown more marked. But when Agnes missed her little rosary and could not find it anywhere, she began to think her prayers were being answered, for she felt sure she had heard it rattle one day when she had unexpectedly come into the sitting-room; but still she bided her time.

And now December, with its first fall of snow, had been ushered in, and even the youthful Hodges were full of plans for Christmas. Agnes was most anxious to signalise this, her first term, with an enter-

tainment or Christmas tree, something that would brighten the lives, at least for one day, of her poor children, and teach the more comfortable ones that Christmas was really something more than a time of fun and feasting.

After much planning and consulting with Father Byrne, it was decided to have a Christmas tree in the school and a Crib in the church. Many were the mysterious parcels and packages which found their way to Agnes' room. The parents were all willing to help the young, brave girl who had lived down all the innuendoes about her religion, and by her impartial kindness had won over the most obdurate of children, and, miracle of miracles, had conquered the invincible Reuben, who was now her most faithful knight; but what added the crowning virtue to all the rest was the self-sacrificing of part of her vacation to give them pleasure. They little knew what a fierce struggle it was to remain away from home on Christmas Day, while her heart was hungering for a sight of the dear ones at home. But this act was offered up for Mrs. Harrington, though only God and Father Byrne knew the extent of it.

Christmas Eve came cold and crisp, and there was so much to be done. The tree was standing proud and erect in a corner of the class-room ready to be tricked out with the secret stores. Over in the vestry mysterious sounds of hammerings were heard; while two huge cases were waiting for Father Byrne to open them and disclose the wonders of the first Bethlehem in Millbank.

The children had all been to confession, though a few tired fathers and mothers were kneeling round the rail awaiting their turn. Yards of fragrant evergreens were twined and garlanded round the pillars, and above the altar shone the star and crimson scroll with its loving invitation, 'Venite adoremus.'

Christmas morning dawned clear and cold, and under the starlit sky throngs of eager worshippers were wending their way towards the little chapel, now so brightly lighted for the 5 o'clock Mass. Many times did Agnes breathe a fervent prayer to the Divine Infant as she knelt before the Crib, crude enough in its arrangements, but to the simple, fervent Catholics of Millbank it was like a glimpse into that humble stable of Bethlehem; and the thrill of joy which fills the soul of an artist when he stands before a great masterpiece could not have been greater than that which filled the hearts of the lowly worshippers. The 'Adeste Fideles' rang out its triumphant invitation, true and clear, from the little choir; and to one sobbing form, hidden from view in the shadow of the gallery, the invitation was not unheeded, and years of cold, hard defiance were being slowly melted away in tears of penitential love. After the second Mass no one noticed this heavily-veiled woman slip out of the church.

The first rosy tints of sunrise were brightening the snowy streets when Agnes reached home, where a bright, cheery breakfast table welcomed her. Mrs. Harrington seemed strangely excited, and her eyes showed traces of recent tears, but she was more gentle and affectionate than before, as she shyly kissed Agnes and laid her little Christmas gift beside her plate—an exquisite medallion of Carlo Dolci's 'Maternity.'

Agnes was delighted and chatted merrily during breakfast, giving a bright account of the terror she had of going out in the dark to Mass, and the climax reached when she had bumped unceremoniously into Mr. O'Malley, the newly-elected alderman, whose two hundred and fifty pounds avoirdupois had swelled to almost double its bulk by the aldermanic honors.

'And now I must hurry and pack my suit case, for after High Mass I shall be so busy with the children's tree that there will be no time, and to-morrow morning I am off for home and dear, dear mother. But I am sorry to have to leave you all alone'—a sad, wistful look crept into Mrs. Harrington's eyes—'however, I shall be back in a few days' time,' added Agnes.

Any one who has undertaken the trimming and stripping of a Christmas tree can well understand the joyous excitement of the little ones as his or her ticket is drawn for one of the coveted prizes. Thin, half-fed, half-clad Nellie Green nearly fainted with surprise and joy when, in exchange of her ticket, a blue-eyed, yellow-

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