

The wedding day drew near. Now and then visions of the old home would rise up before her. She would picture her mother, sad-faced and weary, going about her endless monotony of work. And then she pictured how she would look when she knew all. She would recall the little altar in Granny's bedroom, with the picture of the Sacred Heart hanging over it, pleading for His child's return. Should she go back? But it meant giving up this man and that she could not do.

The wedding morning came at last. Sheila rose early. It was a heavenly day. The sky was deep blue without a cloud. She put on her best white costume, and tucked into her belt a little bunch of roses he had given her the night before. She took extra pains with her hair. Yes, she was pretty, she said, gazing in the mirror. And then she suddenly paused—her hand on her heart.

What was it that almost made it stop beating? Why, that fear—that strange uneasiness? What voice whispered: "You must give up this man; you cannot marry him?" Was it her Angel Guardian? Was it the Sacred Heart?

"You, a Catholic, will not be married if you go before a civil judge. You will be commencing a life of sin."

The Sacred Heart! Memory brought back those bright, happy days. The mornings she had received Him into her heart, and bowed her head down and worshipped Him. Where now those fair promises of being always His faithful handmaid? Had she not broken her word? What blessing could result from such a marriage outside the Church? It was a grievous sin to be followed by a life of sin; for a Catholic, to have a valid marriage, must be married before the priest and two witnesses.

"But I have promised," she said, "and I cannot break from him now."

Bright sunshine streamed into the room but it failed to cheer her. Her heart was heavy. She went downstairs and ate her breakfast without any appetite. On a small table in the window was a cage, with a canary hopping about. The little creature suddenly burst into loud song. Sheila rose and approached it.

"Ah! that is my Dickie!" cried the landlady, suddenly bustling in. "He always sings best in bright weather. But it wasn't always so, Miss Follard," she went on, coming to the window. "Dickie was a poor singer till I put him in the dark. They say it's a grand way to teach little birds. Give them darkness and solitude, and they make fine singers."

"Was it not so with me?" Sheila's heart whispered to her. "Once upon a time, not so long ago, Jesus put me in the dark, so to speak. He sent me many trials; my life was a hard one—but I was at peace, for I loved Him, and my heart sang for joy when I knew He was near, cheering me. And am I now going to forsake Him for this man?"

She turned away and gazed sadly out of the window. She was sorely troubled. The landlady, thinking she had a headache, withdrew. She knew nothing of the proposed marriage.

A heavy stormcloud swept over the soul of

Sheila. It was the conflict. But the sun was hidden behind the cloud, waiting to shine down on her. She began to pray.

"Dear Sacred Heart, forgive me; I have done wrong, and now I am in terrible distress. Send me grace to do my duty. Help me!"

As if in answer, there came a loud ringing at the street bell. A few moments later the landlady announced a visitor.

"She says she wishes to speak to you. She would not give her name, Miss."

"My mother?" Sheila asked herself. Aloud she said, "Show her in."

A strange woman, middle-aged, coarse-featured, shabbily attired, came into the room. She gazed at the girl with contracted brows. Her eyes were heavy and sad-looking; she seemed in trouble.

"You wish to speak to me?" Sheila asked.

"Yes."

"Will you be seated?"

Her visitor complied. There was a short, tense silence. Then she said, in a hard voice:

"I have heard from an acquaintance of Mr. Howson that he is to be married this morning, before the judge—"

"So he had arranged."

"To Miss Follard."

"I am she."

"I am sorry to have to tell you that this marriage cannot possibly take place; the reason being that I am Mr. Howson's lawful wife. I can show you my marriage certificate."

The cheek of Sheila did not flush, nor turn pale; nor was she greatly shocked. But she was surprised—and thankful. Here was an easy way out of the difficulty. She had no love for the man now, no desire to marry him. The Sacred Heart had relieved her of her temptation, and peace possessed her soul.

"I am most grateful that you have brought me this news," she said quietly. "I need hardly tell you that I knew absolutely nothing of Mr. Howson's previous marriage—until now. I thank you for opening my eyes to his true character. I thank God for it. My only regret is that I did not know it sooner."

"I also regret it," Mrs. Howson answered in her same hard voice. "I am sorry that you have been so deceived. Mr. Howson and I have been married over six years. For the last eighteen months I have seen and heard nothing of him. Yesterday I managed to discover his whereabouts, from a person acquainted with him, who informed me of his intended—so called—marriage."

"To prolong my visit is unnecessary, I think. So I wish you good morning." She smiled. "I shall see Mr. Howson at the courthouse, at the hour he has arranged to meet you. Good-day."

She withdrew, and Sheila laid her head down on the table and shed tears of joy.

"Dear Jesus," she said, "how little do I deserve Thy kindness!"

Late that night Sheila arrived home, where she received a warm welcome from her family. She humbly confided to her mother the story of her engagement to her false suitor—and how it was broken off. She expressed her deep sorrow for her past folly, and was readily forgiven.

"Oh, Sheila, my darling," crooned the old grandmother, "I am so glad you have come back! I have missed you terribly. I have been praying and praying for your return. I am not long for this world, and I wish you near, when the Lord takes me."

She lifted her wrinkled hands above the girl's head.

Sheila was happy—after making a sincere contrite Confession and a fervent Holy Communion. She craved no other blessings than those which Our Lord sent her. Very often they were blessings in disguise. Hard work, sacrifice, the ups-and-downs of life she looked upon as fleeting clouds, dimming her soul's horizon. She knew that the heavens beyond were bright and clear.

Occasionally she obtained a musical engagement near home, which pleased her greatly; and she was thankful to the Sacred Heart. But above all she thanked Him for the wise lesson she had learned, namely, that the way of the Cross is best.—*Messenger of the Sacred Heart.*

Observations of a Retreatant

(Contributed.)

"Far from the madding crowd," the attractions and distractions of human life, there only can we pause to meditate upon the emptiness of life and the fullness of Christ's love—then only can we think on the wondrous mercy of God and realise the bitterness of the dregs of life's fleeting pleasures.

"Come unto Me," said Our Blessed Lord, "all ye that labor and are burdened and I will refresh you."

With these words in mind the men of Wanganui set out determinedly to hold a Retreat. It seemed rather a precarious move, for apparently no other parish, with the exception of those which possessed the necessary facilities, had yet embarked upon so excellent a scheme.

Nevertheless an energetic committee was formed whose motto was "Work not talk." The parish priest, and chairman of the committee, Rev. Father Mahony, readily offered

the use of two parish buildings—St. Joseph's Hall and the Villa Maria. As for other necessities there were none. But little daunted the committee immediately set about raising funds and started to manufacture its own material. Fortunately a few carpenters were among the committee's ranks and the remainder made excellent apprentices. The main committee divided itself into sub-committees and the work began.

Night after night sounds of industry proceeded from St. Joseph's Hall. The neighborhood echoed to the sounds of hammers, and the cheery voices of men who labored in a labor of love.

Inside the building all was noise but not confusion. Here a group wielded scissors and canvas, another sawed battens, while another party seized upon the cut and sawed articles and tacked and hammered vigorously till after a fortnight of hard work, lo!

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