

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

“IS my son at home?” asked Mr. James Barry of the servant who answered his call. “He is sir,” replied the servant, “but he has not yet risen.”

“Tell him that I wish to speak to him immediately.”

While awaiting his son’s arrival Barry allowed his mind to wander over the events of his past life.

Thirty years ago he had crowned the happiness of his youth by marrying the girl of his choice ; since then he was blest by three children and his cup of happiness was filled to the brim.

Then after a lapse of a few years misfortune came in the form of death. First it carried away his eldest son, and although this was a heavy blow to the father, encouraged by his wife, he submitted to the will of God.

But when a few years later, it carried away his wife and second son the poor man in his deep despair denied his God and had nowhere to turn for consolation.

This was fifteen years ago, and all that remained to him then was one son, Frank, fifteen years old, and on this child the broken-hearted father centered all his affections.

The result was that the boy became what is commonly called a “spoiled child” and as he grew older a source of worry rather than of joy.

It was this son he was now summoning to his presence. A week ago, seeing that Frank was bringing disgrace upon him, he had in an interview with the boy told him that he must either give up drink and his boon companions or he would have to leave the house until such a time as he would prove himself worthy to be his heir, and now his son having shown no signs of reform, his father resolved to put his threat into execu-

tion although he would have preferred some other solution to the difficulty.

His train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of his son.

We need not lift the veil of privacy which surrounded the interview between the two ; suffice to say that the father did not alter his determination and the son, his own pride being aroused by the words of his father, did not entreat him to be lenient, but turning his back upon him, he left his home in anger.

Then continuing his wild career he sank lower and lower into degradation and, not having been taught by his father to turn to God in his troubles, he became a wandering drunkard, spending all his earnings in drink, depending upon charity for his meals and sleeping under any shelter he could find.

The ravages of this dissipated life gradually told on his health and symptoms of some severe malady began to appear. He kept up, however, for a time but finally as he was entering the little village of Ashton, one day, his strength gave out and in his fatigue he entered a woods, lay down to rest, and soon lost consciousness in the grip of a fever which had long been threatening him.

The next thing of which Frank became conscious, was of having a beautiful dream in which he pictured himself at his mother's knee learning prayers ; these he could hear his mother repeating in soft musical tones. Suddenly he opened his eyes and instead of finding himself on the ground in the woods he found himself lying on a bed in a beautiful room, and, still hearing the voice repeating the prayers, he thought he must still be dreaming. Then casting his eyes about the room he beheld a child on its knees praying, and, it was not until she spoke that it dawned upon

his bewildered brain that he was really in a luxurious room and that it was this child's voice that he had heard.

Noticing his return to consciousness the little child bounded to his bedside, and with a joyful expression on her countenance exclaimed: "O! Father Haley was right."

"Who — where — how did I get here?" gasped Frank.

Then the child, who was not more than ten, began to tell in her own simple way, how happening through the woods she came upon him unconscious; how in her alarm she ran for assistance to her father who was the doctor of the surrounding country, and how the father immediately went to the place where he was lying and had him carried home.

"You were then," she continued, "in a high fever, and father did not believe that you would live, so he summoned the priest of the village, Father Haley, who after seeing how sick you were told me to pray for you, that you might live if it be God's will. I did; and now you see what our dear Lord has done for you: he has heard my prayer."

"What is your name?" asked Frank, his mind still in a haze.

"Mary Preston," she answered, "and my father is Dr. Preston."

"And he cared for me during my illness?"

"Yes, he and Father Haley have cared for you during the last three weeks."

"Then," said Frank weakly, for the exertion of speaking was telling upon him, "I must live, if only to thank my good friends; "and", he continued, "will you say another prayer while I go to sleep for I am very weak?"

Before dozing, however, with the child's voice in prayer ringing in his ears he wept bitter tears, for the words of the prayer brought him back again before his mother's knee when she was teaching him his prayers, and then he himself offered up a prayer for his kind friends that he might be spared to thank them.

And he was spared. In another week he was able to leave his bed—a changed man.

A month under the influence of Dr. Preston, his daughter and Father Haley, had wrought a great change in him and it was plainly seen that the one principally responsible for it was the little girl, Mary Preston. It was through her influence and that of Father Haley, that he received and retained the greatest gift on earth—the Catholic faith.

During the period of his convalescence the thought that preyed on his mind was : Where should he go when he recovered ? He had no money, no employment, no home. But just as he was about to bid good-bye to his friends, undecided as to what he would do, the problem was unexpectedly solved : just at this time the war broke out in Europe and Dr. Preston, hearing of the suffering of the wounded, and of the need of doctors placed his daughter in Father Haley's care and volunteered for service. Thereupon, Frank resolved to accompany the doctor to Europe as his orderly.

II.

Not long afterwards Dr. Preston, while giving first aid to the wounded, during an allied advance was struck by a stray fragment of shrapnel. Frank immediately rushed to his side but only to find that he was mortally wounded and to hear him gasp with his last breath : “Frank I am—dying—take care—of my—little girl—God bless—you both.” Needless to say

Frank immediately promised to comply with his request.

Next day he sent a telegram to Mary Preston acquainting her with her father's death ; and of the promise he had made Dr. Preston; and assuring her that as soon as the war was over he would be back and would be a father to her. In the meantime, she was to stay with Father Haley, under whose care he felt she would be perfectly safe.

Then after having despatched the telegram he sat down and mused, "I must not break my word—I am to be a father to Mary Preston—the little girl by whose prayers I was brought back to my senses. I must 'make well'—for her sake."

His determination was not in vain. His career in France during the next two years was a most distinguished one. He rose from the rank of private to that of captain. Time and time again he was mentioned in despatches for his "conspicuous bravery on the field of battle." Nothing seemed to daunt him or weaken his determination. Admiring their leader, his men were inspired to a like courage and ardor ; so much so that on one occasion while they were engaged in a fight with the enemy who were securely entrenched his company were on the point of retiring before the hail of bullets from the hidden machine-guns, when Frank jumped to the head of his men and with a cry urged them on. The enemy demoralized by this unexpected assault retreated and were forced to give up their hidden guns which were causing so much havoc.

For this exceptional bravery, Captain Barry received the most coveted of all honors—the Victoria Cross. But his right arm having been disabled in the fight, he was unfit for further service and was accordingly invalided home.

III.

Frank Barry was now satisfied—he felt that he had “made well” and when a few weeks later he arrived in America he lost no time in making his way to the little town of Ashton where Father Haley and Mary Preston gave him a truly royal welcome. The very evening on which he arrived he acquainted Father Haley and Mary with the history of his life previous to his having met them, and concluded by saying: “And now that I have ‘made well’ thanks to you Mary, and you also Father Haley, I feel that my father will be ready to receive again his reformed son, and you Mary must come to my old home to live with me and my father”.

A few evenings afterwards, Frank Barry, Mary Preston and Father Haley set out for Frank Barry's old home.

III.

Seated in his library one night Mr. James Barry looked at the calendar.

“Tomorrow,” he mused, “is Christmas Day; yet what does it mean to me?” Then he had a vision of Christmas Days years ago when he had his wife and children with him. How the old house rang with the laughter of the children in anticipation of the joys of the morrow! But all this was gone—he had now no wife and no children. Yes, he had one son, but him he had driven from his house, and now he had very little hopes of ever seeing him again.

And as the poor man thought of his former days of happiness and contrasted it with the loneliness and sadness he felt at the time, he wept bitterly.

Just then he was interrupted by the ringing of the door bell, and, wondering greatly who would be calling

on him at that time of the night, he waited expectantly.

Then the servant ushered in a young girl and a priest and, in the uniform of a Canadian Officer, a man with a wounded arm.

The eyes of Mr. Barry, in astonishment wandered from one to the other till they rested upon the officer, and, although very few would have recognized in the strong manly face of the man in front of him the weak-willed drunkard, Frank Barry of former years, still the father knew him and with a cry of joy, uttering just one word "Frank" he embraced his son, while tears of joy trickled down his cheeks, far different from the tears he had been shedding a short time before.

But Frank Barry pushed him gently aside and said: "Just a moment, Mr. Barry, and in a few minutes we shall see whether I am your son or not"

Amazed at this speech the father, after he had seated his callers, asked his son to explain.

"You remember," began Frank, "how about five years ago you sent me from your house until such a time as I should prove my right to return to it. Tonight I have returned and now I will submit my reasons for claiming to be your son and heir. My first reason is this uniform, which means that I am a soldier; second this wounded arm, which proves that I have taken part in the great war; third, this medal,—the Victoria Cross, awarded to me for "conspicuous bravery on the field of battle;" and finally, my moral reform, to which the good priest here can testify."

But Mr. Barry overcome with emotion could manage to articulate only two words—"My son."

"Then father, permit me to introduce those responsible for my reform and success" said Frank, "first, Miss Preston, whom I promised to care for, her father

having died for his country, and accordingly I have brought her here to live with us. Through her principally I have derived the greatest benefit on earth, a token of which I will now show you," and amid death-like stillness he drew forth from his inside pocket his rosary.

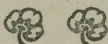
At this a look of pain came over the father's face but he said nothing. "And also permit me to introduce," continued Frank, "my good friend Father Haley, who has helped me to retain this treasure—the Catholic Faith. To these and to my departed friend, Dr. Preston, (God rest his soul), I owe all my reform and success."

Mr. Barry, composing himself as best he could, thanked Father Haley and Mary Preston for their kindness to his son, and welcomed Mary to his home with an earnestness that could not be mistaken. Shortly afterwards the priest took his leave, but Mr. Barry, his son, and Mary, forgetful of the fleeting hours in their new-found happiness talked until far into the night.

At last Mary exclaimed. "It is getting very late and we must all be at Mass in the morning.

Mr. Barry gave a start, for Mass was something he had not thought of for years ; yet he answered, "Yes daughter, you are right ; we will retire." The following morning the thought that came to Father Haley, on seeing the three of them at Mass was ; "A little child shall lead them."

P. McM.'21.



Don't put too fine a point to your wit for fear it shall get blunted.—Carvantes.

In Memoriam

Clifford Cahill
Wilfrid McKenna
Samuel Mahoney

Former Students of St. Dunstan's, who, since
the last issue of "Red and White,"
died in the service of their
countries.

"And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods."