

LETTER-STORIES IN HONOUR OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR PART 2

Edited and published by Rev. Father Bolton of St. Ambrose's Church. Newmarket, Brisbane.

THE MONEYLENDER

He was a young athlete powerfully built and everyone knew who he was from the proud ensign on his blazer. Now a look of amazement was on his face for he was listening to a proposition a moneylender was making to a priest. The scene was in a cafe in the heart of Brisbane. The moneylender told the priest he would give him fifty pounds if he stopped paying a weekly debt on a widow's home in Kennigo Street, Valley, Brisbane. It was the time of the great depression and the moneylender knew the widow's house would fall into his hands like a ripe plum if she was unable to pay the weekly "redeeming money." The priest was the helper of the widow for she was out of work and had three children. It was extraordinary that the moneylender knew who was the obstacle to his seizure of the home. The priest thought of the saying that some people knew the smell of money.

The priest and athlete both felt the cold hand of evil. The priest said the suggestion was unspeakably low and he could hardly believe anyone living in a land of plenty could be so degraded as to make such a request especially to a priest. He was not only angry but felt ill at the proposition. They left the cafe and went to the widow's home. They were invited to enter. The athlete was delighted to see the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in the dining room. He said he had his own Shrine in his home in England and would like to say the Rosary some evening with them. Some nights later he did so and the mother announced a petition to Our Lady for "Help to save the home." The action of the athlete and the low scheming of the moneylender hardened the mind of the priest and urged him to obtain greater help for the widow. She kept her home and her three sons eventually obtained good positions of employment. They realised the great sacrifice of their mother and her grim battle to keep for them their cherished possession. Ideals of sacrifice and prayer to the Mother of Christ formed part of their daily lives. The English visitor wrote often to the boys because sacrifice for children by a good mother appeals to all fine people everywhere and he was fine. His name was Jim O'Sullivan, Captain of the English Rugby League football team then touring Australia. He said he could not blot out of his mind the evil plea of the moneylender. It made him shudder. When he thought of the proposition made to a Catholic Priest, images of fallen angels and of evil powers almost obsessed his mind. Its vileness was something essentially foreign to his way of life. It made him draw nearer in his devotions to the Mother of Christ.

WHITE DOVES AND SMALL DONKEYS

He came around to the priest after the devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour had been completed. He was vexed and contentious. He said he was a non-Catholic but had been coming to the Novena in honour of Our Lady because he liked anything devotional. He was a lay-preacher. For him the Bible was the holy book of God. Every night he read some chapters. The priest realised that behind the bluster the young man was worried so he invited him to his presbytery. The number of biblical quotations the young man could recite was astounding. He told the priest that white doves were mentioned in the Bible 198 times and small donkeys 130 times. The priest had an open mind on these figures for he was unable to check their truth. He searched through his books for confirmation but to no avail.

However, he had to assert his position and state the attitude of the Catholic Church to the Bible, so he set out to prove that numbers did not matter much and that the truth and beauty of Catholic Doctrine was better by far than the dry dust of the Reformation. He informed the young man that white doves and small donkeys in the Bible synchronised with great events. From his Bible he read aloud Chapter VII of the Book of Genesis. It was the story of the Dove and the ending of the Deluge. "And Noah sent forth a dove out of the ark and she came back to him in the evening carrying a bough of an

olive tree with green leaves in her mouth.” He also read out how at Christ’s baptism the white dove was immortally glorified. Luke in his gospel tells us that whilst John the Baptist in humility poured water from the River Jordan on the head of Christ, “the Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape as a dove upon him and a Voice came from heaven saying ‘Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.’”

From the old Testament the priest read the story of Balaam and his donkey which had always been a favourite story around the camp fires of Israel. Balaam was a pagan soothsayer and the Moabites, a tribe hostile to the Jews, besought him to curse the Jews. After promises of gold and silver Balaam consented but was prevented by an angel who obstructed his donkey from going near the Jewish camps. Balaam beat his donkey but God spoke through the mouth of the little animal “What have I done to thee,” it said, “Why strikest thou me.” The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw an angel with drawn sword forbidding him to continue. He became afraid and blessed the Jews crying out “How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel. A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel.”

In the New Testament he read aloud of many little donkeys and the gentle patter of their feet was always connected with some great event. They sounded on the cobble stones of Nazareth when at the decree of Augustus, the Roman Emperor, the Divine Mother with her unborn babe went from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the first Christmas night.

Their muffled sound was heard over the long sandy journey from Nazareth to Egypt as the Divine Family hurried away from the wrath of Herod who wished to kill the new born King of Kings in the massacre of the Innocents. Again the small donkey had a real moment of triumph when he carried the Divine Victim of Calvary on his last journey into Jerusalem. It was the first of our Palm Sundays.

A Catholic poet has put into verse the triumphal entry:—

I may be the tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will,
With monstrous head and sickening cry,
And ears like errant wings.
Fools! For I also had my hour,
One far fierce hour and sweet,
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

The shout was “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

The priest told the young man that anyone could count the white doves and small donkeys of the Bible but to what advantage?

To count the references to the Mother of Christ was of doctrinal use but there was need for something or someone to decide which ones were true. An authority was necessary to accept or reject. The first great truth which the new Testament taught was the Divinity of Christ. From it flowed the pre-eminent place that the Mother of Christ held in the Redemption. It was of small consequence to count doves or donkeys. What did matter was that Christ was God and Mary was His Divine Mother. The priest told the non-Catholic young man to memorize the great Magnificat of the Mother of Christ.

“My soul doth magnify the Lord
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, My Saviour,
Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid
For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,
Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me and holy is His name.
And His mercy is from generation unto generation to them that fear Him.
He hath shown might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble
He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

It took twelve months of thought, argument and meditation before the young man fully appreciated and accepted the Catholic Church. At a parish church in Brisbane on Christmas Day, 1960, he received his First Holy Communion. He says he will not argue again about such topics as the exact number of white doves and small donkeys of the Bible. Now he has a Faith by which he lives and which he knows to be heavenly.

DE PROFUNDIS

He was the best bicycle rider in Queensland. His great asset was the perfect co-ordination between his will and muscles to start quickly at the sound of the starting pistol. He came of a large Catholic family of Woolloowin, Brisbane. Two of his sisters entered the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. He married a Catholic girl of Brisbane. When war broke out he joined the R.A.A.F. and received his initial training as a fighter pilot in Australia. He took to flying with great enthusiasm and was regarded as one of the most promising of the trainees. His judge of distance and height greatly needed by a fighter pilot was phenomenal. He was shipped to Canada with a hundred young airmen on the Empire Air Training Scheme. He obtained all his diplomas and was kept in Canada to train others, but he wanted to go to England to be in the battle zone. A few days before he was due to depart he told his Commanding Officer he could no longer fly. He did not know what was wrong, but he knew that if he continued he would wreck his plane. The R.A.A.F. medico told him to go slow and not to fly for a week. He felt worse and refused to go into the air. He was sent to England, but still knew that something was wrong. He was court-martialled and faced the charge and stigma of cowardice. He was disgraced and given menial jobs to do on the planes. He was sent out of England and in New Zealand he wrote and told his wife he was peeling potatoes for the mess.

His wife was broken-hearted for she knew how high had been his ambitions for flying. She sent him a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and it was to Our Lady that he turned. He said he was going to die, but asked for her prayers to die with courage. He was discouraged for he could not give even an explanation of his disabilities. He ate and slept well but he began to drag his right foot. He was sent back to Australia and was sentenced to a month's imprisonment for cowardice. Medical Officers said his health was excellent. He came to Brisbane dishonoured and his sole friends were his wife and his own people. He prayed to Our Lady for courage to bear the indignity and disgrace of being branded a coward. Numerous Specialists examined him but to no avail. A young doctor at New Farm, Brisbane, diagnosed his case as cancer of the spinal vertebrae. Two bones were almost chalk.

He was hospitalised at Rosemount, Brisbane, and began to bend. Prayer came easily to his heart and mind for Our Lady had given him the courage he had asked for. It was pitiable to see the curved body, now almost in a circle, of the erstwhile great athlete. He was happy and in peace. His wife realized the great drama of his life and his long bitter fight against unknown sickness. She was always sitting by his bedside. The R.A.A.F. Authorities "squashed" all past verdicts and reinstated him to full honours. He died and was given a full R.A.A.F. funeral. His wife considered her husband not only a great airman, but also a great saint. She continued to pray before her shrine to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour at her family home but longed for a greater field of sacrifice, so she joined a sisterhood which labours in India. She received the Missionary Cross from His Grace Archbishop Duhig at St. Stephen's Cathedral, Brisbane. At present she is working on an Indian Leper Station. She trained as a nurse at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Brisbane.

THE TWO LAY BROTHERS

Their home was in County Tipperary, Ireland. Everybody knew that both boys—Kieran and Ned, entered the Redemptorist Order because their mother loved the devotion of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, and the Fathers constantly fostered that holy devotion. She often said that the only time she was free of worldly cares was when the Rosary was being said before her shrine. She grew flowers solely to decorate it. The children grew to love Our Lady. "The young plant will grow straight when staked correctly," she said, and so she helped to stake their minds towards the Mother of Christ. The father was the mighty man of the district, the County blacksmith, and his name was Tim.

Both boys joined the Monastery together. Before they left home the mother impressed on Kieran the elder, the

necessity of always helping Ned. They came to Australia. Kieran, who became a lay brother, was eventually sent to the Redemptorist Monastery, Brisbane, where he laboured during the last twenty years of his life. Those who visited the Monastery on the hill often saw the tall gaunt figure of Brother Kieran doing the menial work of the house. His soutane was always well-patched but immaculately clean. His boots seemed always to be old, but were always well-mended by his industrious hands. He gave the impression that meditation embraced most of his living hours, and he never spoke unless someone spoke to him. He once told a friend that he liked to do menial jobs in the kitchen, like peeling potatoes.

The days of his life passed in an uneventful way. He became sick and a renowned doctor, who was friendly with the monks, told the Superior that Brother Kieran had cancer and would live only a short time. The Brother refused to go to bed or neglect his duties. The Doctor said that the Brother reminded him of the Old Testament prophet Ezechiel, on account of his holy appearance and great voice. He seemed to be waiting for the chariot to fly him on heavenly wings to God he so loyally served, and to the Mother of Christ who now helped him in his mortal sickness. Brother Kieran suffered great pain but refused all pain-relieving drugs. His agony was depicted on his ashen face. The day before he died he stayed in bed for weakness stopped him from answering the bell of the Monastery, whilst it pealed out the morning Angelus. He was asked if he wished to see his brother.

“Oh no, he said, “leave Ned alone, he’s busy.” Ned happened now to be the Most Reverend Edmond Gleeson, D.D., C.S.S.R., Bishop of Maitland. He had become a Redemptorist priest and had been appointed by the Holy See to the Bishopric of Maitland, New South Wales. Brother Kieran died and His Lordship remarked when told of his brother’s death, that it seemed that Kieran had an “express ticket to heaven, made out by prayer, mortification and love of Christ’s Mother.” That same afternoon His Lordship drove to the cemetery outside Newcastle (known as Sandgate cemetery) and there knelt in prayer at a grave whose inscription bore the words “Sacred to the memory of Brother Timothy.” Brother Timothy was his own father who, on the mother’s death, had followed the boys to Australia, and had become a lay brother also in the Redemptorist Order. His Lordship died in 1956 and at his panegyric the preacher told a truth which threw into relief the whole life of the Bishop, by saying that the Bishop had always walked through life with Christ as his companion. Our Lady had gathered to God’s throne three more of her very own.

THE WATCHWORD OF HOLY IRELAND

It has been rightly said that the best immigrant to land on Australian shores was the Irish Mother. She was holy and the strength and endurance of her holiness rested securely on the love she cherished for the Mother of Christ. She brought to the rough ways of men who toiled in the cities and wide-open spaces of Australia a great antidote to anything unholy or evil.

Scattered around Fortitude Valley and Spring Hill, Brisbane, were numerous Irish families and their homes which exist today were wooden gable-structures with attic rooms. The kitchens of these houses were large with great fire-stoves where gatherings for young and old took place at night and where the darkness was dispelled by happy talk and ballad song which harkened back on the wings of memory to the distant Irish homeland. Many were devoted to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour for this devotion was widespread throughout Ireland and the Rosary was always said after the evening meal. Most unmarried immigrants did not possess their own homes but lived in single rooms in residential. No better example can be unfurled of Irish hospitality in the early days than the bright open fire-places in the kitchens of those who possessed homes and the wide open hands of the Irish mothers who greeted in kindness every new exile who came to their doors. Here hearts were warmed for the struggles ahead. If they died, the Mothers of the Irish homes took the bodies to their kitchens where they rested until the horse-drawn hearses took them to the Church. The idol of these kitchens for a number of years was an Italian priest named Canali. One of his most poignant stories is told about an Irish girl who died in a residential and was unknown. She was brought to one of the kitchens but no one claimed her. For what reason she came to Australia remained unanswered. The Italian priest has left on record that many people thronged the gable-house in Warry Street, Valley, to view the body of the girl “beautiful in death with raven black hair and a complexion of white alabaster, but there resulted no definite information about her identity. Amongst her belongings was found a prayer-book

with four holy pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and her name was on each picture—Mary Dwyer, Dublin. The Italian priest said he sought and obtained from his Archbishop permission to read the burial service. Practically every Irish Catholic in the Valley and Spring Hill in the year 1907 went to the funeral and they did so, said the Italian priest, not only for love of their own unknown, but because she carried amongst her belongings the “Watchword of Holy Ireland”—the picture of the Mother of Christ.

The Sisters of Mercy at the Catholic orphanage near the cemetery at Nudgee tolled the Chapel bell when the funeral appeared with its unknown dead. They sent four altar boys and a cross bearer from the orphanage to help Father Canali at the graveside and made sure that three little orphan girls dressed in white laid a cross of Shamrocks on the grave.

THE BIG CAT

Down where I live on a farm on the alluvial flats of the Logan River, Brisbane, there are swarms of large red-black snakes. They grow to eight feet in length and are as thick as a man’s wrist. They move forward very quickly, but it is suicidal to go behind them for they can stiffen and hurl their bodies backwards like poisoned arrows.

In my home there are my husband and six children. My husband, who is a prosperous farmer, took great delight in telling everyone who visited us that he owned a big tiger-tawny cat and that no one could coax it away from him. He did not feed it. I fed it. All he did was carry it and rub its head with his huge farmer’s hand yet the cat followed him around the farm. It took no notice of anyone else.

We are Catholic people and I have a Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in my home. Each night the Rosary is said in front of the Shrine—the picture of Our Lady, the lighted candles and the two vases of flowers. The Picture came from Germany with my parents. My husband was rebellious, but I fought him on the issue mostly for the sake of the children. He always tried to make a joke of the devotions and would bring in his arms his cat to the prayers to annoy me. “The cat and I,” he would say mockingly, “pray hard. The cat better than I.” He often fell asleep whilst the Rosary was being said. Some months ago in the hot days of December I placed my baby of eight months in the motor-car lean-to at the back of the House. The child could crawl. The big cat was nearby. Suddenly I knew something was wrong. The child was crawling towards a huge black snake—sideways towards it. I ran, but the cat moved more quickly. It caught the black head of the snake in its jaws and ripped its body open with great hind claws. I snatched up the child. It was all over in seconds. Now when the Rosary is said these nights there is no mockery from my husband. The great big “goof” loved and loves his own. The big cat still comes but my husband leaves it alone until the prayers are completed.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Succour ever guard my home and children.

THE BECKONING FINGER

She had practised often the trick of the beckoning finger. The top joint of her index finger appeared to be the sole movement of the beckoning. It was difficult to do. She was a beautiful girl and her name was Mary. She was dressed in shining white with a large red hat. She now stood at the intersection of the two main streets of Ipswich, Queensland. Everyone glanced at the radiant girl who bore the impress of refinement and education. She was beckoning to a young man who looked angry and grim. She knew he was annoyed but her woman’s intuition knew also that she had him “hooked.” He came at her beckoning. His name was Peter. “What do you think I am,” he said, “a French poodle?” “O no, dear Peter, I think you are a great footballer—a great full-back.” He played fullback for Ipswich in Rugby League. He seemed placated but on guard.

“Peter,” she said, “there’s going to be a mission at St. Mary’s and I want you to come with me each night. How about it?” He looked at Mary and said, “You know that I have not been inside a Church since I was a small boy.” They glanced at one another and both knew it was a moment of great consequence. He looked into the depths of her large black eyes, was lost, and said, “We’ll go!”

They went to the mission every night. Mary asked the old missionary how she could get Peter back to his church.

The fault, she said, was his parents. The missionary gave Mary a leaflet with prayers to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

“Recite these prayers,” he said, “every day, and Our Lady will bring him back to the practice of his Faith. Mary promised. Six months after the mission the same missionary was kneeling near a confessional in St. Mary’s Church. Night was approaching. The Church was empty except for a young man. The priest wanted an evening paper, so quite unconsciously he beckoned to the young man with his index finger, moving only the top joint. He had learnt the trick from Mary. The effect was electric. The young man jumped up and went into the confessional. The priest was startled, but he also hurried into the confessional box and heard the boy’s confession. It was Peter. He married Mary and became a wonderful Catholic. He always told his friends that it was a beckoning finger which led him back to God, but Mary has her doubts, so she makes him say every evening the Rosary before the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

NICODEMUS

His name was Nicodemus and he came by night. The old priest always chuckled when he thought of Nicodemus. He compared him to the Nicodemus of St. John’s Gospel, who also came by night. St. John was the sole one of the four Evangelists who mentioned Nicodemus in his Gospel and he mentioned him three times. It seemed that St. John was not sure of this dark character who waited for the cover of darkness to pay his visits to Christ, but in the end it was Nicodemus with Joseph of Arimathea who placed the body of the dead Christ in the great tomb.

The man who bore the famous name mentioned by St. John often called on the priest but he did not wish anyone to know it. So he came by night and he said he had his reasons. A suspicion was crystallised into a certainty in the mind of the priest by a number of small incidents that this Nicodemus who was an American, belonged to an Evangelist party which was holding prayer meetings in Brisbane. He always brought to the priest a prepared series of questions on Christ and the Gospels. The priest answered all the questions to the best of his ability and gave the American many Catholic books. He also gave him a Catechism but one night the questions solely concerned the Mother of Christ and on this question the priest grew eloquent for he took pride that here he was on holy ground that he knew and loved. He explained to his visitor the special homage that Catholic people give to our Blessed Lady because She was the Divine Mother of Christ who was God as well as man. He explained the doctrine of the Fall of our First Parents and of Divine Redemption through Christ. The visitor was impressed. He asked question after question. The priest before he left showed him his shrine of Our Lady of P.S. with the vases of fresh flowers and candles. He lit the candles and the American with the enthusiasm of his race said the shrine was beautiful. He came often but now wished to talk only of the Mother of Christ. The Story of Bethlehem, he said, now shone with a new meaning and a new truth. The priest gave him Bing Crosby’s record called “The Small One,” and the American said that every night he heard the patter of the little donkey’s feet on the cobble stones of Nazareth leaving for Bethlehem with the Divine Mother and her unborn Babe. He revelled in the stories of Lourdes and Fatima. Lourdes brought tears to his eyes. He could hardly believe such a place existed in this world of evil and strife.

Six months after his last visit the priest received a postcard from Lourdes with the words : “From your friend—Nicodemus.” A month ago he got a long letter. It told how the American who sang well, had attached himself to the Evangelist group because he wanted a job. He said in the letter that the Revivalist preacher was a sincere and holy man, that he liked prayer meetings, but he knew little about Christ or the Gospels. The leader of the Revivalist group was a sickly type who often asked Nicodemus to lead the prayers or singing when he was incapacitated. He always went to a Catholic priest when he wanted to get religious knowledge on something he did not understand. He knew Catholic priests in every large city of Australia, New Zealand and America, but he always visited them by night because he didn’t wish the priests to know what he did for a living or to be recognised visiting a priest by anyone who frequented the revivalist meetings where he preached. He was now back at Houston, Texas, and was teaching English in High Schools. He had become a Catholic and was now ashamed of the contempt he once had for the things of God. It was the Mother of Christ who gave him his Catholic Faith. In his hungry soul, realisation and acceptance of a Heavenly Mother filled a great need and was heavenly manna in his gipsy and haphazard way of living. He asked for a prayer at the priest’s shrine when the candles were lit before the Mother of Christ. He would always be proud of his name—Nicodemus—because although St.

John said that Nicodemus, perplexed and perhaps ashamed, came to Christ by night, he liked to think of the great service Nicodemus did for the crucified Christ. "Bound It in linen cloths with spices, and placed It in a new sepulchre wherein no man yet had been laid." The "It" was Christ's dead body.

GOD'S WAYS

The old nun gave a holy picture to both the old men. It was a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. One old man was a good Catholic, the other one had practically forgotten his religion. The bad Catholic was coarse, mean and given to saying lewd and obscene things. The old nun visited the wards of the General Hospital every week where the two men were lying. She came from the big Convent in the city, and it was her duty to visit the sick. The old men were very sick. The nurses thought that they both would die within a short time. The Sister in charge of the ward was a young lady dressed in shining white, with a resplendent white veil. She looked healthy and very capable. The nurses and patients liked her. "What have you got there?" she asked the old men; the good Catholic said that the nun had given each of them a holy picture of the Mother of Christ. The bad Catholic said he could not understand the picture and the Sister told him to die as he had lived—keep a stiff upper lip—not to be a coward. She did not believe in superstition and she thought the pictures very ugly. A few days later, the good man was very ill. The Sister sent for the doctor. Whilst the doctor was coming the Sister brought the bad old man to the bathroom. Then, suddenly all the nurses were rushing about, the Sister lay on the floor but the doctor knew life had gone. Apparently the Sister had died from a heart attack. The old men recovered and left hospital. They used to meet on occasions, and both prized in a special way their holy pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour which had upset so terribly the sister in charge of their ward and who had died so quickly. The old must die; but sometimes the young die before the old.

"THE JEWISH DOCTOR"

It is twenty-five years since I took an appointment at the Brisbane General Hospital as a resident doctor. I had just passed my final examinations at the Sydney University Medical School. University life, for some unholy reason then, as now, was often wild and uninhibited. It was fashionable to drink, and drink heavily. I did so with others, and in the end became an alcoholic. Do you know what an alcoholic is? Well, I could not live or exist without drink.

My family lived on the land in New South Wales. They were good Catholic people, honest, sober and industrious. My mother, when she finally learnt my condition and outlook, was horrified. She had spent a small fortune on my education and there I stood looking tragedy and disgrace in the face. When I was appointed to the Brisbane General Hospital, and before I left my home, she made me promise to go to Mass every Sunday and to say the "Memorare" each day in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Although I then disliked holy things, I did it for her, who had done so much for me and who, to me, was and is the greatest and finest person I ever met.

I found it difficult to keep that promise. People drank a lot on Saturday nights in Brisbane twenty-five years ago. On Sunday morning I was generally sick and stupid. A Jewish doctor friend of mine used to give me a hot bath, dress me, though dazed, and send me in a cab to St. Stephen's Cathedral for the 11 a.m. Mass. My Jewish friend knew I had one anchor in "the Mass and the prayer." I told him so. "Lose your anchor," he said, "and you're finished."

After three years I began to improve. I centred all my effort on the prayer to Our Lady and the Sunday Mass.

I often think what I owe to that Jewish doctor. Today I am a successful doctor, with a good wife and family. Drink for me is a curse and I have not taken a drink for seven years. My Catholic Faith is dear to me; above all is my love of Our Lady—my Heavenly Mother. Surely I was blessed with two great mothers The Heavenly Mother of us all, and my own great Mother who loved that Lady under the title of "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour."

ALONE

Her name was Mary and she came from Western Queensland. There was no suitable work in her western town so, after obtaining a brilliant pass in the Junior University Examination, Mary took a position in the Commonwealth Bank,

Brisbane. She was a pretty girl, happy, good and loved by her girl companions. Indeed, everybody liked her for she was very thoughtful in dealing with others. Her mother gave her a parting gift of a large picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She came to Brisbane with a girl friend from her own home town. It was high adventure. Her relatives got them board and residence in a home at New Farm, Brisbane. On her dressing table was the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and Mary said the Rosary by the Shrine every evening. She got friendly with two boys—one was from the Bank where she worked, and the other was a traveller for a large firm. Both had cars and were outwardly good types. Mary liked them both. Then an upheaval occurred. The traveller was dismissed from his position on account of embezzlement of “collected funds.” His court sentence was suspended but he was given a bond. He found it difficult to obtain another good position. Mary felt very sorry for him. She often took him to a Church where the devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was said. She encouraged him when he was depressed but the boy went slowly downhill. He began to drink and then one night he caused an upheaval at Mary’s boarding-house. He wanted to go to a “show”, but Mary determined to stay at home. He began to shout and make a noise. The other boarders were upset and Mary was told that if it happened again she would have to leave. It happened again and Mary was told to find other accommodation. It happened at the next and the next boarding house, and all the time the boy was deteriorating and becoming more like an animal.

Mary went and interviewed a detective at the C.I.B. who gave her some sound advice, reprimanded the boy and gave him a warning. Still, Mary felt great pity for him and asked a priest for advice. He told her to persevere in the devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

The erstwhile traveller was becoming very low and cunning. He pestered Mary for money. She became more worried and hid from him in another boarding house at Teneriffe. One afternoon he watched her leave the bank, followed her home and told her he would make a noisy scene if she did not go out with him that night. Afraid of another upheaval Mary went with him and was driven to a park on the outskirts of Brisbane. There she was shot and he committed suicide. It seems sordid but all Mary’s friends think otherwise. Mary was a great apostle for the devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour amongst her companions. The Picture of Our Lady was the most noticeable feature of her room. She constantly spoke of Our Lady. Her death seems pointless, but its stark tragedy brought her father back to the Faith. Her bank companion became a lay brother in a religious congregation, and her girl companion became a sister in a missionary order ... Who can fathom the ways of God?

POSSESSED

At the close of the 1914-18 war, a very wealthy family lived outside a large town in northern New South Wales. The father had made, in a few years, a huge fortune. He had foreseen before the declaration of war, that there would be a great demand for good horses. He bought horses throughout the length and breadth of Australia, and the Army bought them from him; hence his great wealth. They were a Catholic family and very united to each other. The homestead was set in magnificent surroundings and the mother was the great “personage” of the home. They had one great sorrow, the youngest boy, then aged 15 years, took epileptic fits. In these fits he blasphemed and used violent and obscene language. When at peace he had an angelic face, but in fits he looked like a demon and acted like one.

One afternoon the mother of the home told the family that the Monsignor of the Parish—a great priest and a great friend of the family—was bringing a holy missioner to “bless the boy.” They were coming to afternoon tea.

The family were all present and in the way of country people all dressed-up to greet the priests. During the tea-drinking the boy had a fit. His face swelled and grew purple. He cursed impurely, and strangest of all, he cursed the Blessed Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Ghost—in doctrinal language which was entirely unknown to him. The Missioner was astounded. He heard the language of St. Thomas Aquinas from a boy in a fit who had the mind of a child. The mother ran to her son, gagged him, and held him tightly. He would have bitten the mother if he had not been gagged.

The Missioner blessed the boy with the prayers of the “Ritual.” As the last blessing was being given “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,” the boy howled shrilly and snapped out of the fit and became calm. The mother took the gag out of his mouth and asked all to act as if nothing had happened.

Before the Missioner departed he told the mother to pray to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. He appealed to her to erect the Shrine of Our Lady in her home. The Picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was bought. The two candlesticks for candles and the two vases for flowers were procured. The Shrine was erected and the Rosary said each night. The old Monsignor who knew most of the details and most of the background refused to discuss the matter. The years passed and the boy, who previously had at least one fit each week, did not have another. One of his sisters entered a convent. It appeared that the heel of Our Lady had crushed the head of the serpent.

“TATTOOED”

In 1940, on the sands of Moreton Island opposite Caloundra, guarding the ocean passage there were numerous six inch Naval guns. They were manned by R.A.N. personnel. A six inch Naval gun on land with a fixed base is a very tough and nasty weapon. They were camouflaged with sand and stunted mangrove trees. With the goodwill of commanding officers, two brothers (identical twins) were camped together and were part of the naval group in charge of the guns. It was impossible to separate the two sailor brothers. Feature by feature they were identical, although they were twenty-six years old. They had been in the Navy seven years, and had sailed over most of the seas in the “Far East.” They loved Singapore.

Visiting Moreton Island as a Naval Chaplain, I unexpectedly came on a group of sailors having a swim. The brothers were there; their backs were bare. They told me that at Singapore they had their backs tattooed whilst under the influence of drink. One had a naked girl tattooed over the whole of his back, and it was strangely obscene. The other had a full tattoo of the traditional picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Singapore is renowned, even in the East, for the wonderful work that is done by its tattoo operators. The tattoo of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was startlingly beautiful. The dual set-up was most bizarre. I knew each brother would have gone to great lengths to get rid of the tattoos.

Some years after, I met one of the brothers; his brother had died in the sinking of the Australian cruiser, the “Perth,” off Indonesia. This is his story:

The “Perth” was sinking, and the order had been given to “abandon ship.” The Jap cruisers kept on firing as they closed in on the crippled and doomed ship. The scuppers ran molten lead. The heat of the high-explosive shells turned cold steel into liquid metal. My brother caught hold of a steel bar, high off the deck to escape the boiling steel. He held on for some minutes and then began to weaken. Everywhere one could smell the stench of burning flesh. I was in the water watching my brother. His feet touched the stream and were burnt off in a matter of seconds. He died quickly. I swam away. About 40 of us were taken to Darwin, and I served the rest of the war in the Naval base at Launceston, Tasmania. My Catholic religion now means a lot to me and the devotion I have to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is my greatest spiritual joy.

I told him I was sure that the picture of Our Lady tattooed on his back helped him. “Oh, no,” he said, “on my back, to my shame, is a naked girl; it was my brother who bore the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. It seems that Our Lady has given me a chance to repent of my folly.”

THE BARMAID

I was one of six girls who served liquor in a Queen Street hotel in Brisbane, Queensland. Three of us were Catholics and the year was 1922. It was rightly said that in those days a barmaid was either good or bad. She did not remain lukewarm or indifferent to holy things. If she tried to play with the fire of life she was quickly burnt. Quite a number of barmaids went to daily Mass and were very holy. They were attached to different devotions. In St. Stephen’s Cathedral, Brisbane, which we three attended, was a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Many a prayer was said before that picture of the Mother of Christ. It was a pious custom to touch the picture on the completion of a prayer.

On my first morning at Mass, my girl companions told me that if I looked hard enough at the picture of Our Lady, it would glow and light up with a heavenly fire for the one who touched it. I scoffed at the idea. My people had a farm in a fertile belt outside Brisbane. I had two boy friends, one a farmer near my own home, and the other an acquaintance I had met when he came to the hotel-bar. The second seemed to have plenty of money and was most amusing. Everyone liked

him but somehow I was doubtful. I seemed to hear my Mother's Irish saying : "He is too sugary to be wholesome." I knew that in the end I would have to face the issue, for the farmer lad was getting anxious. I determined to ask the Lady of the Picture. I went to Mass and Holy Communion, and then went up the Church to Our Lady's picture. I touched it, and to my eyes it seemed to glow, and a conviction came into my mind : "Marry your farmer boy."

I did so—and now as I write this letter, the old fellow—my husband—has just come in for his dinner. The eight kids have grown, or are growing up. I have had no explanation of the "glowing picture." I had asked the priest, but his look was enough to shut me up. Needless to say, devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is my favourite devotion, and that is why I came to these devotions and have my own Shrine.

THE SHARK

During the war the Americans built long narrow piers out from Cleveland, Brisbane, into Moreton Bay. These piers were sometimes half a mile long and stretched over shallow water out to deep water where large vessels could bring or get supplies.

After the war the piers were used by residents and fishermen with motor-boats. One of the most fascinating set-ups was to watch the arrival of sharks when the tides began to come in. Out in the deep water they mobbed, and then began to come over the ledge into the shallow-water flats looking for food. The small ones first, and then the big ones. The torpedo black bodies would move with lightning speed, and their movements and antics would hold onlookers in their grip for long periods. They fascinated, because like all vermin, although most were timid and ready to rush off to deep water, some were brave; and then there was the odd one which was vicious and mean and quite unafraid. Drop a stone or a stick and these vicious ones would flash to the spot in seconds, ready to tear and rend for food. The mangrove mullet knew to be ready for the sudden darting rush.

One afternoon my children were playing on one of these piers as the tide was rapidly making. The black torpedo bodies would snap at the sticks thrown into the water. Then somehow the baby child fell, or was pushed into the water off the pier. A black body surged forward. Our dog leaped in. It seemed only moments before the big jaws closed around the dog. The child was pulled to the safety of the pier. Every one and everything was silent. Tragedies always leave an aftermath of silence.

When I hurriedly brought the toddler to my wife and told her of the happening, she told me she had been praying before our picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Since then, every morning and every evening, we say our prayers to Our Lady. The shadow of great tragedy came very near to our door. In our home are two holy pictures—one of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, and the other of an angel guarding with great white wings, a child crossing a stream.

"NUTTIN" (NOTHING)

My husband was a big man, nearly nineteen stone in weight. He was healthy, strong, full of happiness and joy of life, which he always wished to pass on to others. When we married we went to Darwin. We prospered. We once owned the famous rice-bowl of Darwin: "Humpty-Doo."

My husband had a black boy, a man Friday, who in the way of black men worshipped my husband. This black boy was named Nipper. A priest once asked Nipper what was his religion! The black boy said: "The same as boss." "And what is that?" asked the priest. "Nuttin," said the black boy. Although "nuttin" may have been their religion, my husband and Nipper taught my children their prayers and catechism. Nipper in the laughing way of real black men, said that he was as good as a priest in teaching the children their catechism. The years went by, I had one ambition in my life, and that was to make a Catholic of my big husband. I asked Our Lady of Perpetual Succour for guidance. All my efforts failed. Nipper became sick and went to the Mater Public Hospital, Brisbane. The Sisters were fascinated by this happy black man who knew his prayers so well. When it was known he was dying, he was received into the Church. His mortal remains, in all their simplicity, lie buried in Nudgee Catholic cemetery. Still my big man remained aloof. He did not wish to change anything. Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was besieged by me. My husband took different executive positions. Finally, he

undertook to establish new cattle abattoirs at King Island, off Tasmania. One Sunday morning he became ill, he grew worse, and at his request I baptised him. We were far from any priest, an island off the mainland of Tasmania. A few minutes after I had baptised my husband and as I knelt in prayer to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, a priest came in—just walked into the house as if he had been called. He heard my husband's first Confession and gave him his first Holy Communion, and anointed him with the oil of salvation. His grave is on lonely King Island. There the Antarctic sea-breezes often peal their funereal dirges. Thus, through the persistent love of my family to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, my two men came into the true faith of Christ. They were both true and valiant men—big in many ways. One was white; the other was black.

THE WHITE FEATHER

We stood at the counter of a large emporium in Brisbane. We were three—an airman, his Mother and a Chaplain. The airman had asked to see some overcoats. It was mid-winter and he was dressed in faded shorts and wore sandals without socks. His cap was quite new. He told his Mother he got the R.A.A.F. Cap at Townsville, where the destroyer called on its way south. He was lucky to be alive. He was an airman—one of a squad of sixteen who had flown “Wirraways” against the Jap Zeros on their first strike against New Guinea. The whole sixteen of them had not lasted many minutes in the sky after they attacked the “Zeros.” He landed his disabled plane on the seashore, and with ten others had walked nearly two hundred miles of coast-line. The Navy put him on a destroyer and the Chaplain had brought his mother down to the mouth of the Brisbane River in the early morning to meet and welcome him. No one gave him any clothing, and Danny (for that was his name) did not know how to beg or scrounge. His mother realised that many eyes in the store were focussed on him, but she thought all were looking upon her son as a hero. Then it happened! An oldish man behind the counter, with a tight smile, handed him a pink envelope. The airman, surprised, tore open the envelope and out fell a white feather. The hush had a meanness. The mother cried, but Danny did nothing. I believe the girls who gave the old man the envelope thought he was a desk officer. Danny selected a coat, paid for it, and the three left the store. The mother told the Chaplain that the great devotion of her life was to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She also said that in the ordinary normal way of life Danny would have laughed at the white feather, but Danny was at the limit of his endurance and terribly affected. The mother appealed to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Her son's sanity and life were at the crossroads. Danny would do anything for his Mother, for she often told the Chaplain that of all her children, Danny had “the gentle soul.” She got Danny to say the traditional prayers of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Danny grew well at his home and tried to forget his experiences. Our Lady loomed large in his life. His great delight was to prepare the Shrine—the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour—the two lit candles and the two vases of fresh flowers cut from the garden by himself. The Chaplain told his friends that a morbid compulsion often drew him back to the great shop just to see the man with the tight smile who gave the white feather to the great airman. Danny went to England with the R.A.A.F. and was killed in England over Manchester on his first flight against the German bombers. His grave is in the war cemetery near Manchester. His mother has another son a priest and still says daily her prayers to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour who put her mantle around Danny when he needed her greatly. She will remember to her last breath the gentle soul of Danny before the holy Shrine.

“THE BLUE CAPE”

My husband and I are good Catholics and have lived ordinary and simple lives. Our only child, a daughter, aged 19 years, who is now almost a woman, had the best of homes, the best of food and clothes, and a very good education. She passed her Senior University examination. She is healthy and pretty.

Two months ago she left our home and took up lodgings with a girl-companion, in a flat in a very social suburb. What for? I did not like to ask myself. She paid no heed to the protests of my husband and myself. I was very upset; in fact, I lost control of everything; only pride kept me going. What would I do? What would I do? was the question I asked myself a thousand times. After some days something seemed to say, “Put your trust in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour”; and that

is what I did.

Going through my daughter's room I noticed the Blue Cape or Mantle of the Child of Mary, which my daughter left behind. I thought I heard the voice saying, "Send it to her." I appealed to Our Lady. I wrapped the Blue Cape, after ironing it well, in new brown paper, and tied it with a big blue ribbon; posted it to my daughter and again appealed to Our Lady. Her flat-mate told me she looked at the Blue Cape as though she could not believe her eyes and dropped it like a deadly snake.

Last week my daughter came home. Again the voice seemed to say: "Do nothing and say nothing." It was the correct thing to do. Now everything is alright. As long as I live, I will always try to look through the eyes of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour on my daughter and her ways, and then I will know that .I will do the right thing.

The Blue Cape saved my daughter; so you see why I love Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and the devotions in her honour.

THE INCOMING TIDE

The two young men were enjoying themselves immensely. The heat had been terrific and now they were swimming near the main pier at Sandgate, Brisbane. The tide was coming in and they did not notice the old man for some time. Suddenly they both became alert to his presence, for it seemed that the old man was in difficulties. They went to his aid. The old man fell over and began to beat the water in a feeble way. All he said was, "Get me a priest." The two young men half-dragged and half carried the old man to the shore. Over the sands, a little old lady was coming to meet them. She looked most pathetic and seemed to sense the plight of the old fellow. "That's my husband," she said. "Is he very ill?" The old man lay on the sand blue in the face and quite unconscious. The old lady said her husband was a Catholic and she would like a priest to be called. Both the young men looked startled, for they were both priests. By mutual consent one gave absolution, the other ran and 'phoned the local parish priest. There on the sand with the tide coming in the last rites of the Church were given and the old man died. The old couple had come from Ipswich (some 20 miles from Brisbane), and they were down for the day at the sea-shore. A few months after the funeral the old lady called on one of the priests. This is her story.

"My husband when he was young became very antagonistic to his religion. He mocked and raved at anything holy. He hated above all a priest. Someone told me about devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, so I determined to follow the devotions in my own home.

One night each week I erected my little shrine—the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, two lighted candles, and two vases of flowers. I said the Rosary. My husband always exploded in anger, but I met him face to face. It was the start of a weekly row. I remained true to the devotions, and each week erected my shrine despite his disapproval.

The years passed, and slowly he began to mellow. First of all he cut some flowers for me, knowing I would use them on the Shrine, and then one night he lit the candles for me. Apparently Our Lady had won. I brought him to Mass, but he was afraid to go to Confession. He told me he would go to Confession the Saturday afternoon following our excursion day to Sandgate. He did not get the chance. He died on the sand at the beach with the afternoon tide coming in. The one prayer I said each week before the Shrine was that he would have a priest with him when he died. He had three. In my sorrow they reminded me of God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for in the three priests I could only see one—one Christ."

CAPTAIN MICHAEL

Michael stole whenever he could. His father thrashed him again and again but to no avail. After each beating Michael still wore his tight grin; and then his father tried the two pictures. One depicted the death of a good man. This room was lit up with a heavenly light, and the resplendent figure of Christ appeared at the end of the bed. Holy white angels were everywhere in the room. The other picture depicted the death of a bad man. His room was dark and gloomy. A big devil with smoke and fire jetting out of his mouth, stood at the end of the bed. Everywhere in the room were devils waiting to clutch the dying man's soul. The father explained the pictures to the boy, and the boy was impressed. He did not steal for

some time. Still Michael worried his father. He tried to drown a small child and the father worried that he would repeat the action. He knew Michael. Michael was very clever at school, and his joy in life was to fight boys bigger and stronger than himself. The fierceness of his attack was appalling. Then World War II came, Michael enlisted although he was under age.

He took the war very seriously. He was the ideal soldier. His uniform and equipment were kept immaculately clean and he was most proficient with all parts of army equipment, especially grenades. He rose in rank very quickly. When the Jap bombers struck Darwin, Michael, who was now Captain Michael, saved three lives and pulled seven dead people from the waters of the harbour. He did not know what fear was. He served with distinction in New Guinea and in the islands to the north. He received the Military Medal for wiping out a machine gun nest of Japs. The ferocity of his attack and the sight of the dead bodies awed Michael's companions.

He became ill. The doctors diagnosed his complaint as cerebral malaria. He was sent back to Brisbane "mentally deranged." He began to read religious books especially on the Mother of Christ. Finally he became obsessed with love of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. He wrote everywhere for books and pictures, and became proud of his library in her honour. He had a letter and a picture from Father Murray, the Superior general of the Redemptorist Fathers at St. Alphonsus' Church, Rome, where St. Luke's historical picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is venerated. His father was happy, for Captain Michael in his love for the Mother of Christ had become gentle and kind and the old tensions were gone. The father who had watched Michael all his life, told a Priest that he thought something evil had departed out of the boy from the time he turned to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Apparently the heel of Our Lady had, once more, crushed the head of the Serpent.

LIGHTNING

The young University student played golf very well. He was very athletic. His parents had been Catholics but they had given up the practice of their Catholic Faith and had reared the boy (their only child) in a pagan way. Over the years they endeavoured to fill the mind of the young man with a contempt for anything religious. It was a planned campaign. He had passed his Junior and Senior University examinations with brilliant results. Now he was enrolled at the Queensland University and had completed three years of the engineering course.

It was St. Patrick's Day and he was playing golf with a huge Catholic Priest who was his great friend. They had a lot in common and generosity was the mark of both. He was intrigued with the priest's sallies and now the priest in his droll way was making him look at the collection of pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour he had collected. The great gift of the huge priest was the gift of wishing things on the unwilling without offence. He appeared to be a child but was very wise and he knew the boy's background of Catholicity. He had six varieties of pictures. The best one, all in black and gold, he said, came from St. Alphonsus' Church in Rome. Two varieties came from France, and two from America. Now, he said, the sixth came from Australia and it was sky-blue. It was, he continued, very pretty but was not true to the historic original.

The golf game went on for they played for a St. Patrick's Day trophy. As they neared the golfing house a violent electric storm broke. The priest hurried to the golf-house, but the young man with two others ran to the shelter of a nearby large tree. The young man held a steel golf club in his hand. A most vivid flash of lightning struck the tree and it splintered in the middle. Those who were sheltering there were stunned but the young companion of the priest was hurt and blackened. When the others recovered, they noticed his plight as he lay in a puddle of water. He asked them to bring his priest friend. The priest came and the young man said he was dying and wanted to be baptised a Catholic. On the golf course he was baptised and the priest performed all the last rites of the Church. There was real spiritual joy on the injured face of the boy as he received his first Holy Communion. Before he died he told the priest that he had been keeping company with a Catholic girl whom he intended to marry. He died on the course as the afternoon storm was ending.

GOD IS NOT MOCKED

The two young men both played Rugby League football well. Both were married and two children graced each home. They were now getting dressed for football. One in his marriage had given up the practice of his Catholic religion, the other in his marriage had drawn closer to his Church. Whilst they were dressing the brown scapular of the good Catholic caught in his shirt as he was pulling it over his head and he got into difficulties. His friend released him. “So you still wear that superstition,” he said. How can a piece of brown cloth with a picture on it be of any assistance? The good Catholic did not reply but he placed the scapular over his shirt in his locker for the cord was broken.

When the game was over he became aware that a little stray dog was the source of merriment amongst his mates. He looked at the dog and found that someone had tied his brown scapular around the dog’s neck. He retrieved his property and said he did not like anything holy of his to be mocked. No one said anything more.

Some years later he was coming home in the train with his friend when the plastic strap broke on the parcel he was carrying and numerous brown scapulars were revealed. His friend laughed and asked him whether he was going in for scapulars in a wholesale way. “No,” he said, “these scapulars are for the children of the Catholic School who are making their First Holy Communion. I know you have given up your Faith, but do not mock it, for that frightens me. Mockery, like scandal, is three-edged. It sins against God, it hurts the mocker, and it can hurt the mocked. I think of Christ’s words—God is not mocked, so let us remain friends but don’t make fun of my Catholic religion. Our Blessed Lady means a lot to me. I have her Shrine in my home—the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, the Candles, and Vases of Flowers and we all, as a family, say the Rosary before that Shrine each evening. Surely I have the right to do that without being mocked or having to apologise. They nodded coldly when they separated near their homes.

It was dark, cold, and it was raining. Later that night as the good Catholic family was saying the Rosary, the ‘phone rang. Apparently the wife and two children of the mocker were coming home in the dark and were all killed by a motor truck. The husband was bereft. At first he was stunned and he cursed and raved but that did not bring his dead back to life. He now had nothing on which to lean. He broke down on his friend’s shoulder and sobbingly told him it was he who had draped the brown scapular around the little mongrel dog. It had worried him and over the years it seemed to grow meaner and meaner. He had always loved to mock and the scapular seemed like a flag which he deserted. He mocked everything holy when he could but now apparently God had struck back and left him naked. Nothing remained—life held nothing. His friend tried to console him and brought him back to his home. He knelt with the rest and the Rosary was finished before the Shrine of the Mother of Christ.

MASSIVE HANDS

The gaunt old lady was dying on a verandah bed at the Mater Public Hospital, Brisbane. She had been in hospital for six months. Her complaint originated from “diabetes.” Everybody liked her. The Sisters of the hospital looked upon her “as indispensable” for she was always doing something useful. She always radiated peace and happiness and her bright smile brought a response from all who came in contact with her.

Her son and daughter sat at her bedside. On the table at her bedside was a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. The most notable feature about her was her large muscular hands. They were naturally huge and massive and now they were swollen. The old lady died fortified with all the rites of her Catholic religion.

The daughter after the funeral at Toowong Cemetery, Brisbane, wrote a letter about her mother to a priest.

“My mother in her early days was plagued with a violent temper. After my father’s death it grew worse. She was a big woman, and in a rage, with her own hands she choked and killed her sister. When questioned by the police she made no denial and frankly admitted everything. She was convicted for murder. She served twenty years in the State Penitentiary and my brother and I were reared in a Catholic orphanage. During her years of imprisonment my mother grew to love Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. A priest taught her this holy devotion to the Mother of Christ. On her release we came together. Our lives have been difficult but despite hard times we remained together.

The sole joy of my mother’s life for the last ten years was erecting the Shrine of Our Lady each night in our small

home off Coronation Drive, Brisbane. There she found peace and from the Shrine gathered in her smiling countenance a holy radiance which most found irresistible. The naturally massive hands became enormous and enlarged as the result of sewing canvas whilst in prison. I love the devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour because to the end it gave courage, holiness and happiness to my mother. I pray that my brother and I will be equally as loyal.”

BAPTISM AT SEA

He knew he would remember all the days of his life this great gathering of ships on the high seas. Its designation was “Rendezvous.” Ships were everywhere. Great massive aircraft carriers surrounded by monster battleships, cruisers of the line, numerous destroyers and many other naval ships. All were stripped for fighting and were going north along the Queensland coast. They had refuelled at the great seaports of America and Australia. The Australian Navy was well represented. Destination was the port of Wewak along the northern New Guinea coastline. The necessity of “softening up” a port or island before marines landed was dominant in General McArthur’s design of war. Wewak felt the full force of the great blast of the naval guns and it seemed that nothing could have survived. Still no signal was given to land. The next day bombardment was again commenced and nothing appeared to be left standing. The marines landed and the Japs appeared like ants in their thousands. The battle raged, but in the end the Japs took to the hills. A fortified port was established.

On the way to Wewak the engines of an Australian destroyer failed. The great armada passed on its way. It was submarine area in a restricted passage. Danger threatened. Two Australian destroyers ranged close to their powerless sister and began to take off personnel. In the middle of the operations the alarm sounded—Jap planes and submarines. The two destroyers quickly disappeared into the mists over the horizon. Numerous whale boats were scattered on the sea. They were strafed with machine guns by the Jap planes. Westerly winds began to blow with gale force and accidents quickly followed. Three boats capsized. In one boat there were seven men and all were injured and wounded. Nothing could be done except wait. Waiting in an open boat tossed by high winds and waves is a frightful ordeal. Sullen despondency sits on everybody and nerves fray and crack. It is easy to lose control. The strongest man in the boat broke first. “Why don’t you pray better, why don’t you pray?” he said to the priest, “get us out of this mess with your prayers.” The little silent officer who had been number one on the destroyer, said “Shut up! for heaven’s sake shut up!” He told the priest he was badly wounded, and knew he would die. He wished to become a Catholic for in every letter he received from his wife and children they wrote how they prayed to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour to guard and help him. This part brought tears to his eyes. Now he was going to die, could the priest do anything for him? He knew all the prayers his wife and children said at home. He knew the life of Christ and what the Mass and Sacraments were. How much more was needed. “Nothing more,” said the priest, and there in an open boat on an open sea, the naval man was baptised. He made his first confession, was anointed and died.

Only three of the seven lived through the ordeal. The priest was one. Months afterwards he met the widow and her children and told all the circumstances of the naval man’s death. The widow’s sole remark was that her holy confidence in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was not misplaced. The priest as he went away thought of Christ’s words: “Everyone who liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever.”

A FOOL FOR OUR LADY

He was in hospital and was far from anyone he knew. He was a priest and was frightened not so much that he would die, but at the treatment his condition demanded. It was the first time he had seen or received a blood transfusion and the ordeal appalled. Then there was the intricate instrument which kept all food from his body. It was a nightmare. The hospital authorities told him that the doctors were going to operate and that there was little chance he would live. He did not care very much but many thoughts crowded his mind and confused him. In the end he made his mind call up the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and there he tried to anchor it whilst he waited to go to the operating table. The final dressing with white cap and white socks gave him an awful jolt. He did not know such things were done or

necessary. He brought his mind back to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour for he knew he was a priest and it was right that at such a time he should completely concentrate on holy thoughts. Our Lady must have helped. Whilst he lay on the operating table he became depressed at the silent white figures of the doctors and nurses, but the image of Our Lady seemed to steady his mind and keep it calm. The new anaesthetic that brings oblivion with a single plunge of needle found a willing victim, and he awoke some hours later with the image of the Mother of Christ before him. Our Lady was ironing out many of his difficulties. He spent months in bed. He lived, but he was told that he was still in the woods and then they operated again. He acted as he did in the first operation but he felt less afraid. They operated seven times, and finally he was not afraid, for the Mother of Christ always gave him help and encouragement. He was told that in all probability he would die, and that saddened him for then, he thought he would not be able to do anything priestly again. He was denied all medicine for relief of pain. The great surgeon told him that the battle was not won through palliatives.

He appealed to Our Lady, and the conviction came that if he endeavoured to do something special for her cause, he would receive help in a heavenly way. "Special" seemed to convey the right idea, but how could he make it "operative." Time, no doubt would suggest a way. Perhaps after all, he thought, during the many long hours of night, it might not be paying too high a price to become a fool for the sake of Our Lady, because what looked folly could be truth, and that when he really came to the end of his life, the folly he sought could pay higher dividends than the wisdom of this world. "A fool of himself" could well be that he would place Our Lady first always and not stop because others might consider him foolish to go ahead. He decided he would always endeavour to go ahead for Our Lady's cause against himself and any human objections or considerations.

Surely he is now foolish from a worldly angle in publishing these letters in honour of Our Lady. He is also performing an act which is special for him, and foreign to his way of living. Despite the predictions of many, he is well and is able to do his priestly duties. He now hopes to keep on fulfilling his promise to the Mother of Christ, because he has already heard the beat of the waves on the eternal shore, and they are never entirely forgotten. Often from imminent fear of death, one may try to go beyond "seeing in a mirror as in a dark place" about which St. Paul speaks, and try to imagine in a human way things on the other side where everything is face to face.

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S MOTHER

He will always do what I, His Mother, wish however untimely or however undeserved.

In the small town of Cana, of Galilee, there was a marriage feast to which Christ, his Mother, and some of His disciples were invited. The people were poor and during the feast to their embarrassment, they found they did not have sufficient wine for their guests.

The Mother of Christ said to Him : "They have no wine." And Jesus saith to her: "Woman, what is that to me and to thee. My hour is not yet come." His Mother saith to the waiters : "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye." Now there were set there six water-pots of stone. Jesus saith to them : "Fill the water-pots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them : "Draw out now and carry to the chief steward of the feast." And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water; the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him "Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now."

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.

Gospel of St. John, Ch. 2 - vs. 3 to 11.

These letter-stories are built on realities and each reality is based on a spiritual influence attributed to Our Lady. The letters sound a true spiritual note for they come out of the daily lives of people.

Imprimatur
✠ JAMES DUHIG,
Archbishop of Brisbane
