

LETTER-STORIES IN HONOUR OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

Edited and published by Rev. Father Bolton
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Foreword ...

By SIR HENRY WINDSOR F.R.C.S., Knight of St. Gregory

I welcome a further contribution to the series of letter-stories in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour from the pen of a priest I know well. The book has the quality of a missionary crusade created by Apostolic zeal and supplemented by a method which is incisive and which pin-points basic fact with great effect. Each story whether of misery, disappointment, courage or disaster is a sublime word of spiritual intervention and the peace it brings. One or other of these letters has a personal application to each of us for at times we have experienced similar episodes without perhaps recognising the spiritual significance because our minds have been burdened by worldly cares. Men have often laid aside their cares in search of spiritual happiness as participants in pilgrimages to sacred shrines but man will only make of the world a shrine when he makes of his life a pilgrimage. Such is the message of these letters and its basis is devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. We can never assess the reward of this devotion but we will be conscious of it in our being, and supremely happy in its promise, for Our Lady of Perpetual Succour will assuredly provide us with the guidance and protection that will mollify our lives and sanctify our duties on our pilgrimage to the glories of everlasting life.

Luke the Evangelist painted Me. .

The claim that St. Luke painted the original of the famous picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour comes from inference as well as from historical consideration. St. Luke was a doctor of medicine and a most learned man. His gospel was written in classical Greek. He loved to paint portraits yet some will have us believe that during the years after the Resurrection of Christ whilst our Lady was alive and with whom Luke was in frequent contact, he did not paint her portrait. People in the time of Christ loved the portrait as much as the written word. Luke by profession and by his character was a personality who did what he thought best. Reasonable consideration demands that he painted the Mother of Christ. If he wrote, surely he painted? Again the strong tie of devotion that the early Christians had for Christ's Mother guarded a likeness common to all her pictures. This basic likeness is apparent in the icons of Russia and Constantinople and the ancient images of Our Lady at Jerusalem, Antioch and the catacombs of Rome. Place the pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and Our Lady of Vladimir side by side and the likeness is quite obvious. Painters like St. Luke put on canvas to the best of their ability what was presented to their gaze. The era of the abstract was unknown. The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour came to Australia principally from Ireland. There it had been hallowed by blood and persecution. It is thus easy to appreciate why it is loved by Australian Catholic hearts. Even in our great love of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour it must not be forgotten that all icons ancient or modern have the sole objective of increasing our devotion to Christ's Mother.

The First Prophecy

I will place enmities between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and Her seed. She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for Her heel.

Genesis ch. 3, v. 15.

THE VISION

Hast thou stayed, I must have fled.

He was an old priest and on Friday afternoons liked to stay in his room at the presbytery and devote an hour before the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. He looked upon it as “his private holy devotion for the week.” Sometimes he would pray continuously, sometimes he would read and sometimes he would sit and meditate. It depended on his mood. His hour’s devotion grew more compelling and appealing as he grew older. He did not like to be interrupted. In fact no interruption had occurred for his housekeeper (his sister) protected his privacy. However, one Friday afternoon his ‘phone kept ringing persistently, for his sister was ill. When he answered it, he was told that a boy of sixteen who had T.B. for years had suffered a haemorrhage but had recovered. The doctor had advised there was no need for alarm or anxiety and so there was no need to hurry. The priest did not wish his devotions to be broken, so he said he would go around to the home after his evening meal. He went back to his room but found the bright glow and enthusiasm which had previously activated his devotions had departed. He looked at his Shrine but Our Lady had lost for him her usual appeal. In his annoyance he accidentally knocked over and broke one of the glass vases of flowers on his Shrine.

He seemed to feel that something was wrong. All his life he had loved a poem which the Christian Brothers of Gregory Terrace, Brisbane, in his school days had taught him. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan in his convent school often selected the poem for the principal item of recitation at their annual concert, for they knew how often he quoted it and how much it appealed to him. The poem told of a monk who was in his cell saying his prayers. Christ appeared. The startled monk marvelled and prayed with greater intensity, but Christ did not speak. The Monastery bell rang calling the monk away from prayer to do his duty. He became upset for he did not wish to leave the “Vision” and yet he knew he should obey the rule of the monastery. Finally he decided to go where duty lead and do what his rule commanded. He went and gave out the pieces of bread which had been set aside for the poor waiting at the monastery gate. Afterwards he came back to his cell and Christ was still there. All that the “Vision” said was “Hadst thou stayed I must have fled.” The priest now thinking of the poem became alarmed and felt an urge that he should go quickly and see the sick boy. He thought that by delaying he might be keeping the “Vision” away from the boy. He went, gave the last rites of the Church to the boy, who was now much better, and slowly walked back to his presbytery. He kept thinking how wonderfully holy was the expression on the boy’s face when he received the Christ he loved so well. As he entered, the ‘phone rang and he was told the boy had died whilst he was walking back. There had been a second haemorrhage.

He went to his room and Our Lady seemed to be radiant again. He sat down and thought of Christ’s words to the monk “Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled.” In the last years of his life the silent lesson often came to his mind for he was a very holy priest and he did not wish his own “Vision” of Christ to flee from him. One of his first acts after the incident was to quietly give away all he owned to holy causes. He died at the Mater Hospital, Brisbane, and someone who knew his love for the holy poem remarked that the Vision of Christ seemed to be very near him during the last moments of his life. The sole person he told of the incident was his aged sister who lived some years after his death.

P.S. The priest around whom the letter revolves was the late Rt. Rev. Monsignor F. Burton of Wilston, Brisbane.

FROM A HOME NEAR TULLAMORE

On September 5th, 1960, a Sister of Mercy was buried at the Catholic Cemetery at Nudgee, Brisbane. Another Sister of Mercy at the funeral quietly put a small parcel and letter in the pocket of a priest. The letter asked the priest to keep the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and to remember the deceased nun in his masses and prayers. The ancient picture in its gold frame had been richly prized and reverently cherished. A few priests, some nuns and some orphan children were present at the graveside. There was also present one of Brisbane’s most renowned surgeons. That is how this story originated.

She was only sixteen years of age and she stood with forty-eight other girls and two nuns at the back of the Irish

packet-boat which was preparing to leave Dublin for Liverpool across the Irish Channel. She had journeyed to Dublin from her home near Tullamore. The year was 1924. The nuns were Sisters Mary Damien and Brendan of All Hallow's Convent, Brisbane, Australia. A large number of relatives and friends stood on the wharf. Practically every eye had the glitter of a tear for the forty-nine were leaving their homeland to labour for the cause of Christ in distant Queensland, which was many thousands of miles away.

The whistle sounded, the ropes were cast off and the packet-boat began to move. At a signal from one of the nuns the forty-nine started the hymn "Hail, Queen of Heaven." A stillness came down on ship and wharf. Every man took off his hat. All knew something of great consequence was happening to the lives of the forty-nine young girls. The number of missionaries in the exodus may not have been the greatest to leave the shores of Ireland, but the exodus was still a great spiritual adventure even when one considered the historical European monasteries thronged with Irish monks; and the countless Irish priests, brothers and nuns labouring in the mission fields of the world. Forty-nine young lives dedicated to God even without uniforms could not be despised. They were bringing timely and heavenly aid for the Cross of Christ to a distant land where it was greatly needed.

The boat gathered speed and journeyed out over the channel. The young girl of sixteen years who waited with the others at the back of the boat to catch a last glimpse of her relatives and friends on the wharf and of Ireland before it faded away, held in her hand a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She gripped it tightly for its roots went deep into the heart of the home she had recently left. Her mother had given her the small picture in its golden frame and told her "never to lose it." It had been in the family home a very long time.

Now in Australia for nearly forty years the picture had been lovingly kept and had ever inspired by holy ideals and childhood memories the young girl who had become a Sister of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. At her work in a hospital, an asylum, an orphanage, and in the ups-and-downs of daily life she had placed her confidence in her Lady with its golden frame. She kept it hidden but it always gave her strength and uplift in difficulties and upsets. It kept the holy adventure of her life on a high spiritual level. The picture brought back recollections of her childhood days in her home near Tullamore, Ireland, and of simple joys and sorrows shared with her many brothers and sisters. In her picture she saw the green mountains and running streams which was the setting of that lovely hallowed spot. All the crimsons and purples of tropical lands could not compare with those green hills for they spelt home where she played as a child. In looking at her picture her thoughts might wander and fall back in reverie but despite distractions the Divine Mother with the Infant Jesus in her arms ever gazed steadfastly back in gentleness and affection at her devotion and sacrifice.

At the back of her picture in its strong golden frame there were three words, which always brought a lump into her throat and which were written by the hand of her Mother. They were "Ireland, Mother Ireland." The nun always looked on the words as her mother's silent cry of faith and love for her daughter in distant Queensland. Holy wisdom had inspired the hand of the Mother for she had rightly estimated the great spiritual power of Our Lady and the fierce maternal call of Ireland to one of her own when she gave the picture and wrote the words as a parting gift to her daughter. The ancient picture had been known in the family home as Our Lady of the Penal Times.

Now, at the end of life's road in distant Queensland, at the Nudgee Catholic Cemetery, a small white cross marks the grave of a Sister of Mercy, who was one of forty-nine, and who came from a home near famed Tullamore. The good fight was over and the crown of glory won. As the renowned surgeon remarked, her passing was sudden and tragic but she left a wealth of noble memories to her community due principally to a small picture of Our Lady hallowed by limitless personal love and ancient family ties.

P.S. The young girl who came from Tullamore received the religious name of Sister M. Gonzales in the community of the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane. The ancient picture now belongs to a former Queensland girl once called Jane, who is a nun in a Carmelite Monastery in South Australia.

FROM THE GATE OF HELL

The priest was excited. He thought he had been watching Satan. The hallucination had been extraordinary. The scene was in an old spacious suburban house in Brisbane, and on a seat in the garden what appeared to be an evil figure was talking rapidly to a pretty young girl inviting her to go on a launch for a weekend in Moreton Bay. The priest was on the verandah of the house. Suddenly the hallucination faded and an ordinary young man of the city dressed in conventional clothes appeared. The priest was nonplussed. He knew both. The girl was a remarkably gifted commercial artist, and the young man had good business connections. He was supposed to be wealthy. He spent most of his spare time in gathering members for an organisation called "Peace Rally." There seemed to be nothing wrong with its objective yet somehow it breathed forth the fetid air of Communism. It worked from a book arranged like a Catholic Catechism. There was question and answer. The main topic was "world peace" and this catch-cry was repeated like the refrain in a song. The girl consented to go on the launch trip. The priest told the mother that he considered the organisation degenerate and subversive and did not conceal his anxiety.

The launch picked up its passengers at Hamilton on the Brisbane River. It was a magnificent white launch—the most luxurious by far in Moreton Bay. During the journey down the river someone announced twenty-two young people aboard. They were very special young people. On arrival at Stradbroke Island they found camps already erected. Someone was master-minding everything.

The girl had encountered bitter opposition at her home for the mother was genuinely alarmed. She said she did not like the bohemian atmosphere of the gathering and her mother's intuition insisted there was a hidden motive behind the elaborate set-up. The island outing was enjoyed by all and was voted a great success.

Numerous speeches were made at the meetings but they were all innocuous. It was proposed that the camping weekend should be repeated. On the occasion of the fourth camp a Communistic ideal was blatantly expounded by one of the speakers. Objectors made their presence felt and the launch-owner was one of those who asked pertinent questions. No one suspected his bona fide. The daughter told the mother all that had happened for there were disturbing elements which made her uneasy in mind.

The mother was shocked that the daughter had repeatedly missed her Sunday Mass and was dismayed at the direction of events. She appealed to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She asked Our Lady for help in dealing with what appeared an undercover danger. "Undercover" was the priest's word. She prayed continuously. Prayer had been taken for granted in the past but now she placed all her reliance on the Mother of Christ. Our Lady was the beacon-light in the darkness of these hidden manoeuvres. She did not know how to act. Nothing seemed tangible. Instinct told her that the launch-owner was the key-figure and her daughter's special friend. She was convinced that his opposition to communism was a cloak and assumed to allay suspicions.

Matters drifted for a time. Her daughter told her that a great rally was going to be held on the Island at Point Lookout to celebrate the approaching New Year. One hundred new adherents to the cause for "Peace" had been hand-picked and were going to the camp. Then the daughter dropped her bomb-shell. She told her mother that she was going to resign from the organisation and that as long as she lived she would not miss again her Sunday Mass. Her mother asked no questions. What caused the change in outlook, she did not find out. Something very vile and evil must have raised its head. The girl went to confession and Holy Communion. The New Year camp was big. There were 85 new members. Mass was said on the Island and the girl was present each Sunday. It was Christmas holiday time. At the inaugural Meeting when the girl announced her resignation the launch-owner became most abusive, but her friends shielded her against his verbal attack. Emotionally upset she and two girl friends went to Point Lookout as the New Year was about to commence. It was nearly midnight. The sea was calm—not a ripple on the waters and the moon in high glory lit everything like the sun during day. The tide was dead low. The girls climbed down nearly to the surging waters of the famous cove. Still the waters were thirty feet below them. Then it happened. A big freak wave struck. The Pacific Ocean is noted for these freak waves. The waters in the cove rose in a twinkling of an eye at least sixty feet and the girls were sucked out and down into the foaming

upheaval. Their bodies were discovered in the morning light and all three were dead. They had been in the water some hours. The mother in Brisbane mourned her daughter but she had a great consolation for her daughter had recently come back to the practice of her Faith.

The young man who looked like Satan and worked like him fanatically for an evil cause prospered for some years but was found a few years ago dead in his great white launch. His face was quite black for he had hung himself. The priest who first became suspicious of the rich young man often wondered whence came the vast sums of money needed for the camps on the Island. The versicle "From the Gate of Hell" often came to his mind when he thought of the untimely death of the brilliant young artist and her two friends. The words "From the Gate of Hell" occur in the priest's office and Mass for the dead. The liturgical response to the versicle is "Deliver. O Lord, their souls."

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THE JEW AND THE CHILD

The confirmation ceremony in the Church had been long but now it was nearly over. The boys from the parochial Christian Brothers' College had come first, then the girls from the Presentation College. They had advanced two by two to the High Altar, to be confirmed by the Archbishop and had gone back to their seats. Now a gasp came from the people and every head was raised. The common silence was broken by something unexpected. A little girl dressed in white was leading by the hand from the back of the Church an old man whose hair was white and whose clothes were very formal. They were walking very slowly up the main aisle of the Church. His Grace the Archbishop waited seated at the High Altar for the venerable figure to come and kneel before him on the altar step. The old man was a Jew and he was over ninety years. His journey up the long aisle seemed to proclaim that although the journey of life had been long, decisions long delayed had been made and finally reached: The setting presented an unforgettable picture to those present. The Mitred Archbishop and the great High Altar decorated with crimson flowers contrasted vividly with the kneeling old man and the child in white. The old man had come to receive the Sacrament of the Holy Ghost for he wished to become a strong and fervent Christian. He was a convert. The Sacrament greatly appealed to him as it would, he said, to any true Jew. Strong ideals had always guided the Chosen People, but two were dominant—the worship of the one true God and the expectation of the Messiah. Whenever the Jewish people lost these two ideals during their long history they eventually came back or were brought back by the strong hand of God. That was why they were selected as the "Chosen people." They were chosen to guard the essential redeeming truths of fallen man. They had a covenant with God. Moses had given to them the Ten Commandments beaten on stone. The first was very direct. "I am the Lord Thy God, thou shalt not have strange Gods before me." No other nation had kept loyal to this first principle of human living. They had all gone astray after false Gods or craven images. The Jews alone held on high the banner and worship of the One True God. Now that he was a Catholic, said the old Jew, he could not understand why his people had persistently set their minds against Christ who without doubt was the expected Messiah. Even today Jews cling to the worship of God the Creator, yet they refuse to flow along with the strong tide of their history and admit Christ. Yet who was greater than Christ? Who could sway the minds of men more than Christ? Who could do more good? Who could bring more holiness to life? Or who could give more bread to the poor? Who could grant forgiveness to evil? Who else could bring sap to dead wood? He was the Resurrection and the life. He was pre-eminent but they denied Him as their God and Messiah. Perhaps they had struck too evilly at Him whilst He walked amongst them. Perhaps the shadow of His blood had darkened for all time the mind of their nation. They certainly failed Him and cast him out.

At the dinner-table when he returned to his home one of his own asked him what made him finally take the step which brought him into the Catholic Church. Without hesitation he said, his wife and the way she lived her holy life. Her great devotion to the Mother of Christ was so heavenly that tears came into his eyes when he recalled it. She was always gentle and holy yet gave the impression of strength and courage. Many a time during their long life together, he thought how fortunate he was to have such a companion. He had been a business man and was often worried and upset. She calmed him and gave tranquillity to his thoughts. It was obvious to him that her power came from her devotion to the Virgin

Mother of Christ. Finally, when he saw how she accepted death he determined to become a Catholic. It was recollection of her that gave him courage and dignity to walk up the aisle of the Church at the Confirmation Ceremony today, after the children of the Schools. He wished it that way, although the great priest of the parish desired to obtain for him a private bestowal. The old man lived for a few more years and those of his home will recall in memory as long as they live, the bent figure kneeling before the large statue of the Mother of Christ, which belonged to his wife and before which he said his Rosary. The way he said the great prayer was simple yet majestic like most things he did in life.

5

A HIGH MOUNTAIN HOME

I was a nurse in a children's hospital for twenty-seven years. I specialised in Children's complaints and was regarded highly by the hospital board. Indeed they asked me to apply for the matronship of the vast hospital but I refused, for I did not like office work or the exercise of authority.

For the last four years I have nursed in the surgical section. There was one ward set aside for diseases of the brain. I asked to be appointed to that ward. Most of the children there had little speech or they spoke in a blurred fashion. They fascinated me but some months ago I found myself silently crying when they wheeled one of the mites to the operating theatre. To me death seemed to go wheeling along with the child. It was my duty to prepare the youngsters for the operation. I would dress them tenderly in clean white pyjamas, and make sure that the hair of their heads was entirely shaven off. Their heads were then bound around and around with white cloths like parts of a burial shroud. The percentage of deaths was very high. Without the operations death would have claimed most of them, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to present a professional poise when I knew that few would return to the ward and that nearly all would die on the operating table. The final blow which sapped my confidence happened a short time ago. A child of seven years was hospitalised in my wing. Her name was Mary. The diagnosis on the chart read "suspected tumour of the brain." Her long hair curled in a most natural way. All my experience told me that the little girl was going to die. She differed from the others in one respect. She had a beautiful voice. There was no blurring of the spoken word for her voice was distinct and melodious. The mother told me that they lived in the high green mountain country of Gippsland, Victoria. The father was a timber-getter. They were fairly poor.

It was nearing Christmas and city organisations came with presents and toys for the children. Groups of young boys and girls mostly from Church bodies went around the wards and sang Christmas carols. One afternoon during one of the entertainments I stood near Mary's cot and she whispered that she could sing a song but it was not a Christmas carol. It was a Catholic hymn. I asked the leader of the group to let Mary sing. Mary sang and silence came down on all. It was angelic and one of the young visitors afterwards said she thought she was listening to an angel of Bethlehem. The voice was high and clear like the notes of a bird. May I repeat the words of the hymn.

(1)

Lovely Lady dressed in Blue
Teach me how to pray;
God was just your little boy
Tell me what to say.

(2)

Did you lift Him up sometimes,
Gently on your knee;
Did you sing to Him the way
Mother does to me?

(3)

Did you hold his hand at night,
Did you ever try

Telling Him stories of the world,

And, oh, did He cry?

(4)

Do you really think He cares,

If I tell Him things,

Just little things that happen

And do angel wings make a noise?

(5)

Can He hear me

If I speak low,

Does He understand me now,

Tell me, for you know.

(6)

Lovely Lady dressed in blue,

Teach me how to pray,

God was just your little boy,

And you know the way.

The nurse resumed her story and told how she prepared the child for her brain operation. She was certain that the child was not going to return to the ward, but the child did and grew well. "I guarded," she said, "the spark of life night and day."

The child is back in her high mountain home and is completely restored to health, "for," said the nurse, "I went back with the child to the lonely place and did all I could and left only when I knew that there was no further danger.

The mountains are high, vast and silent. Huge giant trees are everywhere, and these trees hold a silence which is awe inspiring. Everything is in direct antithesis to the great city hospital and its constant bustle and movement. The family possessed only the bare necessities of life, but in that high green mountain home I found something spiritual which I intend to hold for the rest of my life.

She said she had made a vow that if God gave life to the child she would become a Catholic. God gave life so she wished to become a Catholic. She had "lots of time" for she had retired from active nursing. She liked saying the Rosary for Mary always wore her Rosary beads around her neck.

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"OUR TAINTED NATURE'S SOLITARY BOAST"

The hospital was not large. It was a small brick building on the south side of Brisbane. A matron, two assistant matrons, and some trained nurses were responsible for its efficient running. It was different from other hospitals for it treated solely diseases of women. From the highways and byways of the city inmates came to its portals. Some were brought forcefully by the arm of the law and some came of their own free will. Although the use of modern drugs was unknown (the year was 1929), it was most hygienic and everything tended to keep it that way. The matron and her two associates who were very skilled nurses had been chosen for their firmness and capacity to deal with emergencies. They had no religious beliefs. A young girl who was known to all and sundry by the name of Eileen had been admitted and she had persistently asked permission to fix at the head of her bed a rather large picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

The Sisters wondered how the other girls would accept the holy representation. "Do not worry about me," said Eileen. "I can defend myself and what I own." A nun had sent the girl by post the holy plaque for Eileen had been a child of an orphanage. She was bright, intelligent and renowned as a wonderful mimic. The nurses had been astounded at a repeat performance she had given of a bitter quarrel between two of the inmates of the hospital. The voice of one girl was deep, loud and raucous—the other voice was shrill, high and quick, yet Eileen's mimicry of both was perfect.

There may have been a reckless air about everything she did or said but when she spoke of Our Lady a gentleness and holiness came to the fore. No doubt she recalled the holy life of the orphanage. She had a good audience because the three nurses knew the blasphemous ways of most of their charges and it was rare for a girl like Eileen to raise her voice in honour of holy ways. Tears were in the girl's eyes when she said the words "our tainted nature's solitary boast." The high-sounding words came from the girl without any ostentation. The matron afterwards wrote down the words and was surprised to find out that the renowned poet Wordsworth wrote them. The picture of Our Lady was fixed at the head of Eileen's bed but the jeers of the others were soon silenced by the quickness of Eileen's bitter words. The staff heaved a sigh of relief.

It may have been only a small flag exerted in honour of holiness but it was a defiant and proud gesture in a world of fallen and degraded humanity. The matron and the sisters were attracted to Eileen. Her courage was something unexpected and appealing. Whenever they got an opportunity they veered conversation towards the Holy Mother of Christ and endeavoured to find out what that devotion meant. It was a new line of thought for them, and they held many a discussion. For those who practice the natural virtues it has been rightly said that virtue attracts and evil repels. These three nurses had led spotless lives but now Our Lady represented a heavenly ideal for them who came in daily contact with the consequences of sin.

Eileen told them that she would not have fallen into evil ways if she had remained true by prayer to Our Lady. Having left the orphanage, being lonely and afraid she was an easy victim to evil friends. She knew she was making excuses but she knew also that her sole hope of redeeming herself was to go back to her devotion of the Mother of Christ. The nurses were impressed. It seemed as though Our Lady was using spiritually the appeal that Eileen made, to give them the gift of faith. They became friends with a nun in neighbouring convent and were able to get solutions to their many questions. They talked and talked about their problem and read a diversity of Catholic books. They attended a mission at St. Stephen's Cathedral and finally embraced the Catholic Faith. On visitation the government auditor of the hospital noticed the pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour on the different tables of the Sisters, but made no comment. He was not a Catholic. One of the trained nurses told him the story of the triple conversion, and he it was who wrote this letter.

7

THE PHOTOGRAPH

The big Colonial homestead with its wide verandahs overlooked a large lagoon which was surrounded with weeping willow trees. The lagoon had always been accepted as a sanctuary and was always full of wild bird life. The sheep station was immense for there was a muster of over 20,000 sheep on the property.

The year was 1931 and it was the sixth day of January. Living at the homestead besides the father and mother were two sons and five daughters. They were an excellent Catholic family and had great devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. There were pictures of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in every bedroom and the one on the mantle-piece over the fire-grill in the dining-room was framed in a magnificent antique silver frame. It was beautifully embossed. The mother and younger son were holidaying in Brisbane for the young man was shortly going to celebrate his 21st birthday. The rest of the family were gathered together in the home on the night of January 6th and were admiring a photo of the younger boy, which had been taken in Brisbane and posted to the homestead. It was a good photo and portrayed the young man who was educated, refined and a lover of the outdoor Australian way of living. The youngest girl said she would get it framed before the 21st birthday celebration. "Get it framed before they come home" said the father. For some reason the girl neglected to do this and discovered the omission the day their mother and brother were due back. They searched everywhere for a suitable frame but in vain. Then the youngest girl took the silver-framed picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour off the mantle-piece and substituted the photo of her brother in place of Our Lady. The result looked very good. The others offered no comment although they had misgivings. This solution of the difficulty did not seem right. In the bustle of cleaning the house to welcome the holidaymakers they forgot what had been done. The mother on arrival quickly noticed the substitution and was upset. She held her peace and made no comment that the substitution did

not please her for she did not wish to hurt the feelings of the family who only wished to make her arrival home as happy as possible.

That afternoon the young boy took his horse and gun and rode off to shoot kangaroos with young friends. In the excitement of the chase he was accidentally shot and died within a few minutes. The homestead was appalled at the tragedy. In the full joy and vigour of youth, the life of the young boy was ended. The mother was demented. She blamed the substitution of the photo of the boy for the picture of Our Lady. The youngest girl who had made the substitution was also irreconcilable. They both felt guilty of a hideous sin. When the priest came to the dead boy at the homestead, he heard the story of the substitution which seemed to cast a dreadful shadow over all the family. He told them it was wrong to make a mountain out of a thoughtless act but their grief was terrible to witness. The mother could not control her sobbing and became really ill. Priest after priest told her she was unwise to make a great evil out of a small incident which was essentially a gesture of affection of a sister towards her brother on the occasion of a great day in his life. The mother died. The father procured another silver frame—an exact copy of the original and on the mantle-piece in the dining-room the two pictures were placed—Our Lady and the photo of the dead boy. Everyone was unhappy. The family knew that they were unwisely enlarging their sense of guilt because no disrespect to Our Lady had been intended, but that the youngest girl in her youthful affection had only considered honouring her dead brother for his 21st birthday. The years went by. The eldest son became a priest in a religious order and two of the girls became nuns. The old father always kept flowers near the two pictures and became more and more puzzled and depressed with advancing years. His great consolation in life was to go each year to Brisbane and attend Mass said by his son and heard by his family.

8

NOEMI THE PATRONESS

The doctor asked the priest “Do you know who is the patroness of mothers-in-law?” “No,” said the priest, “and I have been a priest for forty years.” The doctor then told his story.

“I have been a doctor since 1932 but until recently acknowledged no formal religion. The Bible has always been acceptable to me and has been my “Rule of life.” It was sacred in my parent’s home but I have always realised that on great controversial points there was need of an appeal court which could not err. The great questions of life and death demanded clear infallible truth and I know that truth can only be one. I became a Catholic but it was example and not argument which brought about my conversion.

“My wife died over twenty years ago and left me bereft with three young children—all girls. The youngest was a baby of eight days. I was alarmed at my desperate plight but my wife’s mother came to my home and rescue. She took charge. Many told me that the set-up in the home would not work but it did work because my mother-in-law was a remarkable woman. She was wise and courageous and all her wisdom and valour came from her Catholic Faith. Her model was the Mother of Christ. Confronted with a puzzling situation she would ask herself how would the Mother of Christ act? The children called her Mother and after a time I also called her by that privileged name. Her ways were kind, direct and unassuming. If I lost control and was over-severe with the children she took them in hand and brought them back to proper behaviour. They are now adult and are well-educated. I have always believed that life has no finer experience for a parent than to watch the personality of his own child growing into adult state—the blossom into a bud and the bud into a flower. I watched my own grow and gave them every opportunity. My mother-in-law said evening prayers with them before the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. I did not interfere for I had nothing to offer. The problems of life have been part of my profession so it was a dilemma for me to be outside my own personal problems with my own goodwill freely given. “With my own goodwill freely given”—how I pondered over these words. Here was something spiritual. Here was something that I, with knowledge and experience, could not better. My pride was given a jolt but I was honest enough to admit I could offer no improvement.

“For a long time I searched for a parallel to my own case and then I found it. It was in the Old Testament in the book of Ruth. For those of you who do not know the Idyll of Noemi and Ruth, let me tell it. On account of famine Noemi, an

Israelite, left her people and with her husband went to the pagan and hostile land of Moab. She had two sons who married Moabite women. After some years her husband died and then her two sons. Knowing she was growing old and would be lonely she thought she would go back to her own people, but Ruth, her daughter-in-law, said she would go with her. Noemi consented and they journeyed back.

Famine no longer plagued the land. Peace ruled and golden grain was in the fields. Golden grain in old Biblical times meant contentment—no hardships and no war with its fires and burnings. Ruth became a gleaner of the grain and married Boaz—Noemi’s kinsman. Ruth, when she told Noemi that she would leave her Moabite people and go to the land of Israel used immortal words that have glorified affection for the aged and lonely. Let me quote the words—“Whether thou goest, O Noemi, I will go, where thou dwellest, I will dwell. Thy people shall be my people, thy God my God.” Noemi was the prototype of my mother-in-law and both were held in great affection. I was of the people of my mother-in-law (her blood was common with mine to my children) so finally I became convinced that I wished to accept the rest of Ruth’s words “Thy God is my God.”

“I, too, like Ruth, changed my allegiances and I became a Catholic. So to those of my home I can now say “Thy people are my people, and Thy God is my God.” I say a daily prayer from the book of Ruth “Mayest I too receive a full reward from the Lord to whom I have come and under whose wings I have fled and seek shelter.” My joy is heightened when I realise that the genealogy of Ruth lead directly to King David and thus on to Mary “of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.” It was on account of this (divine genealogy) that the Book of Ruth was written.

9

OBSESSION

When she was a young woman she had often become depressed. She suffered the obsession that she was damned. Her hell with its blazing fires and devilish figures was very realistic and deeply affected her outlook. In her sleep dreams gave her lurid nightmares. Her intelligence was of high standard for she obtained her B.A. degree at the Queensland University without difficulty. She married and had four fine children. After her marriage the depressive fits began to occur more frequently and her life very morbid and miserable. Her close relatives and most of her friends were non-Catholics. Her husband who was a business man of high integrity and wealthy was indifferent to any religious appeal.

She became ill and after many discussions a doctor suggested that she go for a time to St. Margaret’s Catholic hospital at Ryde, New South Wales, which was conducted by the nursing sisters of the Little Company of Mary, for the mentally deranged. Good health came back slowly. Her great joy was to go each afternoon to the beautiful Benediction Ceremony in the Convent chapel. She thought it was heavenly. One of the nuns gave her a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and told her to recite daily the prayers printed on the holy picture. She did not appreciate the picture for some time and then the full beauty of the ideal dawned on her troubled mind. The mantle of the Mother of Christ gathered her in its wide and kindly folds and gave her heavenly shelter and comfort in her darks depressive fits. She grew well and was told she could go back to her home. Whilst at the hospital, she read voraciously everything she could about the Catholic Faith. Christ’s Church began to appeal more and more. On her return to Brisbane, she often went secretly to Benediction in a Catholic Church and always said her prayers to Our Lady. After a number of years she was stricken with leukaemia and sullen and hopeless depression again settled on her mind. She told one of her few Catholic friends that she wished to become a Catholic for she was convinced it was the sole portal to redemption. A priest was called to her home and found her well instructed. He gave her all the Sacraments and afterwards she lapsed into unconsciousness. Her husband who had been in the ‘South’ on a business trip exploded in anger when he heard that she became a Catholic through the agency of a priest.. He was vicious in his denunciations. To him the conversion smattered of trickery and was performed with excessive haste. His wife, he said, did not fully understand what had been done. She had always despised everything religious. He would arrange cremation of his wife at death. Nothing more could be done for the wife remained unconscious. Although the doctors did not expect the wife to rally, she did and all her faculties returned. She was at peace. She told her husband that he was to accuse no one for she had desired to become a Catholic for many years but was afraid

to take the necessary steps. The fear of death finally forced her to do so. She got her first opportunity at the Ryde Mental Hospital. She knew that her depressions and dark thoughts of damnation could be destroyed by Faith. The hand of Christ in the Catholic Church always stretched out to her. The Mother of Christ lighted a road through life and freed her of anxieties. She could hear the howls of the demons behind but as long as she thought of Our Lady she was happy and knew her future lead on to heaven. No one had influenced her in her decisions or suggested that she become a Catholic. The obsession of damnation came from the knowledge that she was outside the fold of Christ's Church. The husband was astounded. He could scarcely believe that the mind of his own dear wife had been in such a turmoil about religious matters but he did everything to make happy the last days of her life. He admitted that he had blamed wrongly the Catholic friends of his wife. She died. Although he is not a Catholic, he now carries a picture of Our Lady and understands the reason why the foot of Christ's Mother is firmly placed on the head of the Serpent.

10

THE RING

The old Assyrian was worried and distressed. He asked the priest to help him find a valuable ring which he said had been stolen by one of his four sons. It was a large red sapphire surrounded by diamonds. The mother and daughters were upset and the old man said he had become almost berserk in his denunciations of the boys. The upheaval had been noisy and the neighbours had complained although they were unable to find out the reason of the family quarrel. The old man told the priest that Assyrians loved rings and all endeavoured to possess a good one. The priest told the Assyrian he would do what he could. He had been a friend of the family for many years but when he visited the home, he was met with icy consideration for the family felt ashamed. He pondered over the incident, realised it was a family dispute and told the old father about a stratagem which he said had been successful previously in a family squabble. He had read about it in a United States Catholic Magazine. Erect, he said, a Shrine to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in your home and place on it a small gold book and ask those who are guiltless to write down their names on its pages. He also told him to read aloud each evening an Assyrian poem titled "Abou Ben Adam" to the assembled family after the Rosary had been said before the Shrine.

The poem told about a great Assyrian Chieftain Abou Ben Adam who "awoke one night from a deep dream of peace and saw within the moonlight in his room an angel writing in a book of gold." Abou, alarmed, asked the angel "What writest thou?" The Vision raised its head and with a look of sweet accord answered "The names of those who loved the Lord." And is mine one, said Abou. Nay, not so, replied the angel. Abou determined to cast all evil from his soul and to restore what he had stolen. He spoke more low and said "I pray you then, write me as one that loves his fellowmen." The angel wrote and vanished. The next night it came again with a great awaking light and showed the names whom love of God had blest and lo! Ben Adam's name led all the rest. His name now came first in the book of gold.

The old Assyrian who normally was happy and contented was delighted with the stratagem and did as he was requested. For the first time since the family upheaval started, he laughed when he considered the effect the poetry would have on his eldest son whose nickname was Solemn Mike. Mike was a big dark-featured man, sober-minded and devoid of all humour. The Shrine was erected in the home and the Rosary said. The reading of the poem by the old man was a great success. He enjoyed himself immensely. On the ninth night he found all the names of his family in the Gold Book and the ring in all its beauty on the white cloth of the Shrine table. The names of the four sons had been written together on the front page of the Gold Book. It confirmed the priest in his supposition that the four of them were in the family misdemeanour and were abetted by the mother. She afterwards told the priest that the boys resented the attitude of their father, who considered them children, whereas they were grown men. The boys told their mother that the Shrine of Our Lady, the saying of the Rosary, the Gold Book, the poem, and the visit of the priest were too much for them. They surrendered. Thus peace and happiness came back to the home through the Rosary and a more tolerant family outlook. A victory for Our Lady came out of the incident for the Shrine is now firmly erected in the home and the Rosary said each evening. The theft of the ring is entirely forgotten.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

My wife and I live on a lonely property in Western New South Wales. Our children have married and gone from the land. Good books are the best solace we have in our secluded world so we read voraciously. Poetry appeals to me. A good poem can intoxicate me like wine intoxicates others. I was a soldier of World War 1. During the last few years my wife and I have made a study of the Catholic Faith. I have always had an obsession that religion should be in no way national. It should not be under ruling powers but should be as free as a bird on the wing. I found that the Catholic Church was free and independent so it appealed to me. It gave to Caesar the things of Caesar and to God the things of God. It didn't compromise with Heaven.

Let me tell you how I lived after the War. For many years I was an invalid on account of war wounds. The poetry of the war fascinated me. I idolised one poem in particular called the "Victory Ball" because it symbolised my intense dislike of the terrible slaughter of the young soldiers of the nations. I learnt every word of it and said it repeatedly like a holy person says a prayer, but to me it was a hymn of hate. It told of dead young soldiers watching and enjoying a "Victory Ball."

Let me quote a few verses which will convey my meaning—

Shadows of dead men
stand by the wall,
Watching the fun
of the Victory Ball.
God, how the dead boys
gape and grin
As the tom-toms bang
And the dance makes din

Victory, Victory,
on with the dance,
Back to the jungle,
ye beasts of prance;
God, how the dead men
grin by the wall,
Watching the fun
of the Victory Ball.

There were many similar poems and although there was nothing evil about them they were either pagan or mundane. When I later came across some Catholic poems depicting a Christ unknown to me I was really enthralled. The words seem to ring to me from heaven like the great bell of an ancient Church. They proclaimed a way of life different from anything I knew. They told of the universal appeal of Christ the Redeemer. They were on a higher spiritual level than anything I had ever read. Let me quote some verses :—

1
I see His Blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of His eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see His Face in every flower; .

The thunder, and the singing of the birds
Are but His voice and carven by His power,
Rocks are His written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn,
His strong Heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
His Cross is every tree.

2

He is out as of old in the city,
He is walking abroad in the street,
He tendeth the poor in his pity,
The sinner who kneels at His feet.

3

I fled Him down the nights and down the days
I fled Him down the arches of the years,
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind.

I firmly believe in the reality of God. I cannot understand the atheist. All life cries out, God is. The sun and the moon and the stars at night and all created things demand Him as their First Cause and as their Creator. The words of the Psalmist like Infinite and Almighty only feebly portray his attributes. Without Him all is without reason and without Him there is no answer to the riddle of the world. Poetry again came to my aid. Let me submit a few great extracts.

1

If I, O God, ascend into heaven, Thou art there,
If I descend into hell, Thou art present,
If I take my wings early in the morning
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there also shall Thy hand lead me
And the right hand shall hold me.

2

I saw eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
And round beneath it Time in hours, days, years.

3

Thou, O God, comest not, Thou goest not,
Thou wert not, wilt not be,
Eternity is but a thought
By which men think of Thee.

4

I see, O God, a world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of my hand,
And eternity in an hour.

Finally, my wife and I became Catholics. Books were always our greatest and principal friends. Perhaps you who were

born Catholics are not as conscious of the Faith as we are. To us it symbolises now a spiritual home where we have anchorage, security and all that a home implies. My wife has erected in our earthly home a Shrine to the Mother of Christ—to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. She keeps it beautiful. The Divine Mother holds the Infinite Jesus in her arms and there each evening we kneel and pray. Now as Catholics we have something real in our lives which previously we did not have. Surely you will pray for us for we love the moment at the end of day when we make the Sign of the Cross and say “Our Father Who art in Heaven.”

12

GOD WILL PROVIDE

It was 1930, early in the month of January. It was the year when the great depression reached its lowest depths in Brisbane. A young Irishman from County Kerry who had come to Australia before World War I, had a home in the Valley with a wife and six children. His great devotion was to the Mother of Christ. His seventh child would soon be due. He was a good workman and had kept his position through the early stages of the depression. Now his work place was to close. One fateful Friday he was handed a notice that his services would be terminated the following Friday. He went home with the notice in his pocket but he did not tell his wife for he did not wish to worry her so near to the birth of the child. The week went by. Then came the fateful Friday. The doors of his shop closed for good at the end of the day. After that he went to St. Stephen’s Cathedral and prayed before the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour for a long time.

When he went home he found his wife had already gone to hospital. Jobs were impossible to find in the city of Brisbane. His thoughts turned to the country but purchase of a farm seemed hopeless. His father-in-law could lend him a little money, but only a fraction of what a farm would cost. Then news came of a farmer who wanted to sell his farm to buy a hotel and of a hotel-keeper who in turn wanted to buy a house in Brisbane.

It was a circle. He was able to sell his house at an unexpectedly good price to the hotel-keeper. This, with the loan from his father-in-law was just sufficient to purchase the farm. Despite years of drought and low farm prices he always provided well for his family and ultimately prospered. With his ten children and eighteen grandchildren around him at Christmas time he thinks back to that Friday afternoon thirty years ago when he prayed before Our Lady’s picture in St. Stephen’s Cathedral. In the winter of his life he still puts his trust completely in the Mother of Christ. “God will provide” said the doctor at the Brisbane, Maternity Hospital, when Anne, the seventh child came into this world where a depression raked and pressed down like a dark cloud. How true were the words of the doctor. The saintly names of his ten children reveal the man. Mary, Irene, Joan, John, Thomas, Martin, Anne, Madeleine, Patrick and Kieran. The youngest is a seminarian.

13

THE CHIEF CLEANER

Her home was in Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, and every night she had to produce fifty cleaners. Sometimes she had 45, sometimes she had 55, but Mrs. Beaty from long experience knew how to deal with the different situations which cropped up. She always knew where to get a few more and knew also how to sack those who were not needed. Her cleaners did not have modern equipment—just a broom and a mop. They were noisy and laughed aloud and jostled one another when opportunity arose. Each one well knew how to give a slight which could start a quarrel. It was then Mrs. Beaty showed her mettle. A threatening person appeared and there fell from her lips menacing words, which bit with a deadly sting. Still she was liked and in her own way a great labour leader. The managers in the City of the different Offices which had to be cleaned, knew her worth. She was small, robust, full of energy and holy. She went to daily mass. It was said that she did not miss her morning mass at St. Stephen’s Cathedral for twenty years. Her great pride in her tumble-down house was her large statue of Our Lady. It was placed on a wooden case but was kept with holy and immaculate care. The linen cloths were always spotless. The flowers were always fresh and the candles ready for use. A framed picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was behind the statue. Our Lady, she said, kept her life holy—and free from all evil. She said she did not

smoke, or drink or swear on account of Our Lady. Her devotion to the Mother of Christ was followed by some of her cleaners and these quickly became her special friends.

Her stories connected with her night work as a cleaner were numerous. One she often told, was of a man who was already dead. I spoke to him, she said, for five minutes before I realised that he was dead. I called the other cleaners to his office and we 'phoned the priest and said the Rosary. Another story was of a thief who was caught ransacking an office by one of the cleaners. He made the mistake of threatening her. She called loud and long. We came with our brooms, she said, and force of numbers won. We laid him low. He got twelve months and some of the girls occasionally went to Boggo Road to see him. Other stories told of the man who was found dead in the well of an elevator, of the girl who got locked in an office and became hysterical (we cured her with cold water) and of the man who stayed in his office to get drunk (he was usually most distant, but that night he was most friendly and loquacious. Then there was the high executive who shot himself (the sound of the shot in the early morning brought us all running), and the fine old dress-maker who locked and sealed her room and turned on her gas jet (when we broke down the door she looked beautiful in death).

But these episodes, she said, were few and far between. Life, cleaning offices, was mostly hard, difficult, and back-breaking. Cleaners of offices in the big City hardly counted and were worth at the most a passing glance. Nevertheless, Mrs. Beaty was a personality—poor—illiterate and work-worn but still a great human figure who in her heyday did a lot of kind acts and who knew how to deal with raw feminine ways. The keynote of her power was her goodness and the noble way she rose above the dust of Brisbane came through her devotion to the Mother of Christ. It ennobled her life. People of all walks of life attended her funeral and her friends the police came in their numbers.

14

FROM COUNTY KERRY

When she died she was nearly one hundred years old. Although she had lived for many years under the hot sun of south-west Queensland, her face was unlined and her complexion was no different from the day she left her native Kerry, Ireland, to come to Queensland at the request of her brother, who was a hotel-keeper at Warwick. Her family were very fine people, of whom many were priests and nuns in Ireland and America. She, who all surreptitiously called Annie, was a fearless forthright and wholesome woman. She was a personality. In Kerry where she was born they called her "Queen" but few Queens had her regal bearing or were fit to wipe the dust from her shoes. Those whom she liked she treated with open generosity. She brought to the Darling Downs all the glory and durability of the Catholic Faith of her homeland. Ireland to her meant the Faith. The Rosary was her great prayer and she did not miss a day during the long years of her life in Queensland in reciting the great prayer to the Mother of Christ. Those who came to her home, Catholic and Protestant joined in the holy recitation. It was always a joy for her to say the Rosary in a home whose inmates daily recited the great prayer. She often said that "Loganhome" in the town of Clifton on the Darling Downs was as holy as a Church, for the Rosary had been said daily in that home for nearly one hundred years. She spoke in awed and hushed tones of this great continuous act of holiness because although in Ireland one hundred years of prayers might not be exceptional, it was an unparalleled act of devotion in Australia. She lived at Cunnamulla for many years and was most active in Church affairs. The priests always had a home in the house and nothing was too good for Christ's representatives.

She married a bank manager who was a great Catholic and loved the company of priests. He died a lingering painful death but kept his humour to the end. He was asked before he died if he had any worries. "No," he said, "I have lived a good life. I hardly did anything wrong. I was too well watched by Annie and her friends."

One of her exhilarating memories which she often recounted with pride was the recollection of her great drive in her horse-gig from Clifton to Allora on the Darling Downs with the Archbishop of Brisbane, who was anxious to catch the express train. She said the horse never trotted so fast, but she only caught the express with moments to spare. Old residents of Allora and Clifton still tell of Annie's great trotting mare and the great race for the express. The residents of each farm hailed and waved the horse on its great dash.

She was a great pioneer and in whatever parts of Queensland her footsteps halted there was always the indelible mark

of holiness, and greater devotion for the Mother of Christ. Her last home was at Red Hill, Brisbane. There her great joy and pride was her magnificent shrine to Our Lady. The Altar was always decorated with flowers and the candles were always lit for the recitation of the Rosary. The picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour held high position on the Shrine. She died with her Rosary Beads in her hands and a Hail Mary on her lips. It is to such great Irish people who loved their Catholic Faith and devotion to the Mother of Christ and who gave the impression that God's law came first, even unto death, that the Church in Queensland was founded on such a true and solid foundation.

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

Further Stories in Honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in Book 2
