

pillow. 'You know I must die; I know it's very wrong, but I am frightened to go so far away from you, because I don't know anyone in heaven, and Lipu says when boys are eleven they make their First Communion, and then, if Jesus had come to me once I could tell Him about being frightened, and He would perhaps have an angel waiting for me, when I have to go, to take me to Him.'

'Who told you all this?' asked Mr. Hurst in a choked voice.

'Lipu told me part, and I think the rest myself,' was the reply. 'Lipu has been asking and asking when a priest was coming down this way who could understand English, for me to make my first Confession and then perhaps he would let me make my First Communion, too. But there doesn't seem to be any priests who can talk English in this province at all. The nuns sent word to Lipu that they would try and find one, or if I got worse before they succeeded they would ask their own chaplain to come; and so I am learning the Chinese names for my sins from Lipu, because, although their priest knows Chinese well, he is a Frenchman.'

What were Mr. Hurst's feelings as he listened to his son? Did he think of the advantages of his own childhood and how little he had profited by them? Did he wonder how the child had learnt so much of heavenly things in spite of his father's indifference? Did he think that, unless he repented of this indifference and what it had led to, the parting that now loomed before him would be eternal?

'Father'—the boy's voice was eager—will you try, too? If you promise to find an English priest for me it will be all right, because you always keep your promises.'

And with bowed head Mr. Hurst promised that if by any possibility a priest could be heard of the boy should have his dying wish.

After this, when their eyes opened to the change, every day seemed to bring some new reminder of the coming loss to Mr. and Mrs. Hurst. They spoke often and openly of his great wish, and every evening his father had to repeat to him how he had written everywhere he could think of, asking for an English-speaking priest, yet so far with no result; and it went to the man's heart to see the little son turn to the Chinese Lipu for comfort in his disappointment.

At last the day came when Hubert could wait no longer. A few weeks at most would pass and then even if Jesus Christ had not come into his heart on earth, he would have to stand before Him in a better land. A message was sent to Ning-Po, and ten days later a travelling French priest arrived. Mr. Hurst greeted him in Chinese, but the dialects they each knew were not exactly the same, and they could understand each other only imperfectly. To Lipu, therefore, fell the task of explanation, and Hubert's eyes proved the truth of the Chinaman's story. With Lipu's help the priest learned that the child was sufficiently instructed, and with some difficulty they got through with the simple confession that the boy had prepared with his faithful attendant's help. Now that the priest had come Hubert realised more than ever how much he longed to hear what he had learned confirmed and filled in by one of his own people. Not that a shadow of doubt ever crossed his mind; it was only the natural wish of the human heart, and especially of the heart of childhood, to unburden itself. So many little things came to his mind that he would have asked a priest in English; so much help could such a one have given him by calming his fears and saying prayers that he could understand.

But it was not to be. This little cripple child was to pass away through the grim portals of death without ever having heard an English tongue speak to him of what lay on the other side. He had much, much to thank God for, so he told himself in his quaint, old-fashioned way. Lipu never left his side, and the priest was to say Mass in his room on the morrow, the first and last Mass he would ever assist at; and, above all and beyond all else, he had told Lipu to tell the boy to prepare for the Divine Guest Who was coming to him, for at that Mass he was to receive his First Communion.

All through the night his parents never left him, and Lipu, too, knelt by his bedside and prayed. Then with the earliest light of morning the priest returned, and Mr. Hurst, for the first time for years, heard the prayers of the Mass, once so familiar but long since forgotten.

Death was very near. It was as though some more powerful hand were holding back the angel's sword until the child had received his heart's desire. The room was still. The priest concluded Mass almost in a whisper. That which was passing in the heart of the dying child was too sacred a thing for any earthly sound to disturb. The little face from which the parents could not turn their eyes was already the face of an angel.

Strangely enough, even whilst learning the truths of the Catholic Faith, Hubert had never wondered at his parents' want of religion. Perhaps he thought they said their own prayers just as Lipu did, and that it was only an accidental thing that they had not spoken to him of them; children are often curiously unquestioning, and the possibility of anyone knowing God without loving Him and wishing to serve Him never struck the boy. Now, however, a deeper understanding had come to him. Jesus, Who loves sinners even as He loves the innocent hearts of children, showed the child that there was something great, impassable, that divided him from his parents. Lipu, who had also received Holy Communion with joy and thanksgiving at so unexpected an opportunity, was nearer, far nearer, to the dying boy and his Divine Guest than his own father and mother.

'Father'—his voice was low and weak—'I am not frightened now. Jesus will take care of me! I am sad because no English priest has come.'

'But, darling, you have Father Pierre! See, he is coming to you now,' for the priest, after unvesting, was returning to give another sacrament, that of Extreme Unction, to the child.

'He is kind and good,' whispered Hubert, 'and he has made me happier than I ever was before. I know it is ungrateful of me to wish for a priest I could talk to, only it's not for myself I want him now, because I have Jesus. Oh, father! oh, mother dear! it is for you—.' The little voice faltered and then ceased, but the parents understood.

They saw the yawning chasm that divided them from their child, and it was the most bitter moment of their lives. Mrs. Hurst reproached herself for having drifted away from God and from the forms which in her youth she had been taught to follow; but what were her feelings compared with those of her husband, who had abandoned a religion that he knew to be true, who had thrown aside the gift of faith that God had given him. He knelt beside the priest who had heard his son's confession in Chinese but he was as far from a possibility of obtaining the declaration of forgiveness for his sins as though the whole of that gigantic country stretched between them.

Feebly the child stretched out his hand, but it was toward Lipu that it strayed. It was only an instinctive movement, yet to his parents it was the seal upon eternal parting. Hubert, Lipu, and the priest were one in the fold of Christ.

The day grew on, the sunshine brightened the room; but the shadow of death was on the innocent young features. Hubert's eyes had long been closed, though now and again his lips moved in prayer. Then all at once he looked at his parents, and his gaze lingered for a moment on his father's face.

'You promised!' he said, quite distinctly, and Mr. Hurst understood what the words meant. He had promised to look for an English-speaking priest for his son, and though the boy needed one no longer, he claimed the promise still; but now it was for his parents that he asked for the fulfilment. And knowing this, reading what was written under the anguish of his wife's face, Mr. Hurst answered the boy in firm tones, 'We promise, Hubert!'—*The Magnificat.*

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