

that he regretted the step he had taken. His parents, as well as Father Shuttleworth, were dead before this hour of trial had struck. And Squire Corby, though—or rather because—affectionate after his slow kind, had been glad.

Things had prospered with him. He owned a comfortable farm and a pleasant house. His wife, Mistress Alice, was a notable housekeeper, placid and even tempered as one of her own dappled cows. They had no family, and Alice, so far as she had any religious notions at all, was fully contented with Sunday's attendance at the parish church.

And of recent years Swithin Corby, having at length forgotten a certain day that it had irked him painfully to recall, had been a peaceable and happy man. His days and nights went by in unbroken tranquillity: he never thought much of the future, and the past was unremembered. He was very unimaginative. Without conscious self-analysis he was himself aware of the fact. Nevertheless, although he could not classify his present experiences, they remained astounding and thought-provoking. And Swithin did not wish to think.

They had taken place now for four successive nights. He never hitherto had been troubled with dreams or fantasies, his slumbers being profound. This he knew, and as he lay awake in the starred blackness of a December morning, he pondered the matter gravely.

For four nights running he had dreamed. And the dream was always the same. He was in a vast dark space, windy and filled with a multitude beyond reckoning. It reminded him vaguely of the priory church of other days. In the far distance he gradually made out the luminous outline of a gate or door ajar. It was as though this door gave upon halls of light; now and again it seemed half open. The throng pressed eagerly towards it. All bore candles in their hands, but not all were lighted. Some of those that were lighted flickered fitfully in the breeze: some would hardly take light. Here and there he beheld a candle-bearer's taper glow suddenly into perfection, the clear full flame illuminating its owner's garments, proclaiming them, unlike the rest, a dazzling white. Like stars, these souls then soared swiftly upwards to disappear within these far 'gated golds.'

And then he always awakened. He knew he was awake, thoroughly aroused. Then there stole such a wind through his sleeping apartment that he thought that the snow, lying white and deep without, was surely covering him also with its fleecy mantle. And now, plain as the hand he held before his face for fear, he saw Father Bertrand Shuttleworth stand there in the old familiar white habit, the black cloak gathered about him with his own peculiar gesture—saw him stand in the chill moonlight by the bedside, an arm's length distant.

The face of the friar was sad and stern, and in his right hand he held a candle. It was of great beauty, marvellously white, twisted and patterned of surface, and set in gold and jewelled sconce exquisitely wreathed with tiny roses delicately hued. The first night he had not spoken a word. He had stood there in silence until Swithin, held by that piercing and sorrowfully accusing glance, well-nigh fainted. Then he passed, like a mist. The next night he had shown him the unlighted candle with a gesture of infinite pathos. Swithin saw now that his former Father required a service at his hands. Nor was it long in being made known to him. For on the third night the friar spoke.

'Hast thou no care for me, son Swithin?' he had asked piteously. 'O my son, my son, have I deserved this ingratitude at thy hands? Long years hast thou left me in darkness—thou who fearest darkness and loneliness of old time. Had but thy hand been stretched forth to light this my candle I had gone free, ah! long ago. Wilt thou not now have pity on me?'

But Swithin could not answer for this overwhelming terror at this visitation. He strove to awake Dame Alice, but she lay as though insensible.

On the fourth night the entreaty had been renewed.

'Son, Swithin, hearken! When I was transported to London you time I bore thee day and night

in my heart. Thou were my chiefest thought, my heaviest care, for all too well I knew thy one great weakness and its dangers. Son Swithin, thou were ever my dear child, and I offered myself on that journeying unto my Lord as victim for thee, undertaking thy penance shouldst thou fail as I dreaded, that so I might win thee salvation. And my prayer was heard. There in purgatory for thy sake have I languished weary and alone in darkness to this day. For thee I have waited and suffered silent until now, for otherwise I might have been with God ere this—and thou who hast not seen His Face canst never guess at that privation. Yet fain was I to suffer it that thou mightest never know the ultimate extremity of woe—that terrible denial "I know thee not" from God.

'And now, Swithin, 'tis thou and thou alone canst release me. Wilt thou at length do this?'

Swithin was sobbing. And Dame Alice never moved—hardly breathed, it seemed.

'Ah! how, most dear and holy Father, may such an one as I?'

Friar Bertrand smiled, and it was like a Dawn in Paradise.

'Thou and none other, dear son,' he replied with affection. 'Lo! when this my readied candle shineth forth the Bridegroom cometh forth to meet me. 'Tis thy hand must kindle it, and the brand that thou must bring is naught but that of faith. Light once again the torch of truth in thy soul, return to Mother Church, and in that hour I go to God to wait thee with thy parents—I enter then into light and gladness everlasting.'

It was now after Christmas, a heavy winter snow and cold, and a fortnight had elapsed since Father Shuttleworth's fourth and last visit. He was evidently awaiting Swithin Corby's action.

So much was plain to Swithin Corby himself. He had passed through a variety of emotions, and all painful, during these last three weeks. At first he had endeavored to doubt everything. Finding this impossible, he had pondered the project of repentance. He had never actually lost the faith and he saw his duty far too plainly to admit of evasions. But there were difficulties. He knew no priest; no Catholic would trust him, probably. The greatest difficulty, however, lay in that old trouble, the root of the whole matter. He was afraid, desperately afraid.

Reconciliation could only spell loss, suffering, and, almost certainly in his case, death also. It was a grace, a glorious expiation—oh, he knew it, he knew it, he knew it right well!—yet he feared, suffered terror as he surely never had before. Yet the commonest gratitude and the strongest self-interest required the sacrifice of him; and he knew it to be his only hope of salvation. If he resisted now—and he could so easily—there would be peace again after a time, he knew it truly. Heaven would not ask again. Dreams, all dreams, and men could pay no heed to them—he knew the argument with which he would finally clinch the matter in such a case. Then peace, comfort, respect, his good wife's affection and care—after all, he owed her some consideration also. A quite life—but after?

He was absent in January for a short time. On his return he found the little town in commotion. There was to be an execution on the morrow. Sick at heart, Swithin asked no more, but set spurs to his gallant grey for home.

'Have you heard the news, Swithin?' questioned good Mistress Alice as she sat at meat with him that day, a little after the hour of noon.

'A Papist priest whom they caught red-handed at his Mass some six months ago has been tried, and to-day word is out that he is to suffer on the morrow—why, Swithin, man, what ails you?'

'Tis nothing, nothing, good Alice,' he returned hastily. 'Tis but that I bethink me of a certain and important piece of business which had slipped my mind till now.'

The die was cast. Swithin Corby's mind was settled at last. Dame Alice marvelled at the unwonted tenderness of his salutation and embrace, and at the