

'I think he did, Cynthia.'

'If so, he erred.'

It was the first criticism of her father Miss Minters had ever made, and her sister sat up aghast.

'O, Cynthia, Catholics are not all bad! Mrs. Conley is the dearest little woman, so kind to everyone, and so willing to help everybody! Her children, too, are lovely.'

'Mrs. Conley also has erred.'

'But what do you know of the Catholic Church, Cynthia?'

'Priscilla' (the speaker's voice teemed with impatience), 'this conversation must end! I do not wish to show any ill-will, but I see plainly that certain things must be impressed upon you. First of all, the Catholic Church has been the tabooed subject within our household for years. Yes, I know I said we had heard enough concerning it; but father, in his great charity, would listen to no derogatory remarks against any sect or person. But the words unsaid are those that speak the loudest. I have always realised that if the Catholic Church had not been established here father's church would have flourished to a greater extent; and I know that he, too, realised this. You must admit, Priscilla, that losing one's parishioners to a church that practises idolatry, and—'

Her sister interrupted:

'But—'

'No defence, please! So long as I know that father thought as he did of this religion—'

'But you don't know!'

'I know! And what is good enough for father is good enough for me.'

'Cynthia! Why, you never go to any church!'

The thin lips of the elder woman trembled, and the small, sharp eyes suddenly filled.

'It isn't like you, Priscilla, to taunt me. How can I go when I do not believe?'

'Oh!' The other sprang up hastily and threw her arms around her sister's neck. 'Forgive me, love! I never knew! But do not grieve so, Cynthia, dear! I am not sure that I believe either.'

And there in the old-fashioned sitting room, with the late winter's sunshine showing no mercy to their thin grey hair and wrinkled cheeks, the two sisters clung to each other.

The older was the first to speak.

'I think I shall go to the city to-morrow.'

Priscilla kissed her.

'I shall go with you.'

'On the 9 o'clock suburban?' asked the other, vaguely childish.

'Yes, love! And you can tell the Bishop that, being the rector's daughters and once having lived in the rectory, we would like him to rent other property for his priest to live in.'

'I couldn't stand it if I knew a Roman priest was occupying father's study—a priest!' shuddered Miss Minters.

The brown eyes of her sister softened.

'Let's not talk any more about it. But, dear, do not believe that the Catholics are idolaters. Oh, really they are not!'

'Priscilla, why argue? We will need all our reserve strength in the meeting with the Bishop. Why—why, you know he was once a priest!'

'Yes,' returned the other, 'he was once a priest.'

But her accent of the word was different. Perhaps little Mrs. Conley, who was 'kind to everybody,' had whispered something good concerning the priests of her church to the younger Miss Minters.

At half after 8 the next morning, the sisters were seated in the suburban station. Cynthia had ever firmly reminded her sister that it was always best to be ready and waiting at least twenty minutes for anything, as 'the composition of one's nerves demanded recreation before the excitement anticipated was entered upon.'

Nevertheless, Miss Minters was nervous. Priscilla gazed at her anxiously.

'Cynthia,' she exclaimed, 'you might have written!'

'Underscoring is never permissible in correspondence,' her sister replied dryly. Priscilla understood.

Attired in the cloaks and bonnets of thirty years ago, the two presented an interesting picture for the careful observer. That the attention they attracted never broadened into smiling curiosity or sneering comments showed clearly that, in their case as in nearly every other, character ever mounts above the convention of clothes. The Misses Minters themselves had watched the growth of fashions, but their limited income and their loyalty to the ancient seamstress of the village prevented any change in their fashions. To-day's elastic dress mode demands something more than a three hundred dollar annuity and a non-progressive aged dress-maker.

'What shall we do if the Bishop is not at home?' asked the younger woman.

'Wait for him.'

'We should have brought some lunch, then, Cynthia.'

Miss Minters opened a faded black reticule.

'I have twenty cents above expenses. We can buy our lunch.'

The Bishop, however, was at home. Directed by a uniformed station agent, the two sisters had no difficulty in locating the episcopal residence.

'If you do get turned around,' the young man assured them, 'ask any one you meet. Bishop Lawson is the boss—the big stick—of this town all right. Everybody knows him.'

'Disgusting language!' murmured the elder sister.

An almost indiscernible smile twitched Priscilla's mouth.

'That's the way they talk on the streets nowadays, dear!' she whispered.

'What do you know about the streets?'

Priscilla knew very little, so she evaded the question.

A short walk brought them to an unpretentious brick residence standing next door to a large, stately church.

'It has a cross on top, so it must be a Catholic church,' Priscilla said.

The other woman sought to appear uninterested, but she missed nothing. The carefully swept walks and neat grounds, the shining windows with their modest but immaculate curtains, the general air of cleanliness and friendliness of the house appealed strongly to her.

'It doesn't seem as if "badness" could enter here, does it, love?' said Priscilla, nervously pressing the bell.

Miss Minters frowned.

'Don't forget you are a rector's daughter,' she reminded her sister.

The door was opened by an aged Negro.

'The Bishop, ma'am? Yes, ma'am, he's in. Come right this way, ladies.'

The two followed him into a well-lighted Colonial hall.

'If you sit in this here room,' the man said, ushering them into a small apartment, 'I'll go see when his Lordship can come down.'

'Tell him the Misses Minters, of Shelbyville, desire to see him,' Cynthia crisply announced.

The white head of the Negro bobbed serenely.

'Makes no difference 'bout the name, ma'am.

Bishop Lawson sees everybody who needs him.'

'Hem!' responded Cynthia.

'Thank you,' said her sister.

When the man had left the room, Priscilla gazed curiously around.

'Isn't it pleasant, Cynthia?'

It was a south-east room, softly tinted in brown. Three rag rugs in the tan shades lay on the shining floors; and the furniture consisted of a large library table, a few comfortable chairs and a small desk. Against the wall hung Hoffman's Head of Christ and an especially fine copy of the 'Madonna of the Chair.' An ivory crucifix between two candlesticks rested on the desk, and on the table lay several magazines.

'There isn't any dust, anyway,' grudgingly responded Cynthia.

Her sister, despite herself, laughed aloud, and at that moment the Bishop entered the room. Involun-